THE · SECRET
· ORCHARD ·
AGNES & EGERTON
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THE SECRET ORCHARD

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"'YOU SEEM TO BE MISLED BY SOME CURIOUS RESEMBLANCE SAID THE DUKE, IN HIS ICE-COLD VOICE."—*Page 113.*

THE SECRET ORCHARD

BY

AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE

Authors of "THE PRIDE OF JENNICO," "THE BATH COMEDY," etc.

Illustrated by CHARLES D. WILLIAMS

"Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way."—PROVERBS.

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BOOK I—AFTERNOON

"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depth of hell."—PROVERBS.

THE SECRET ORCHARD

CHAPTER I

SILVER and gold lay the landscape beneath the terrace of the Château de Fitzroy, this golden month of September, this golden hour of the afternoon. The fields of La Celle bathed in sunlight, the wooded slopes of St. Michel and Marly already autumn yellow, melted into the delicate hazes of the valley where the Seine shimmered distantly, stream of burnished silver between the dim silver of its banks. In the far background, just substantial against the unsubstantial sky line, poised like the last fantastic touch of a romantic painter, rose the ruined arches of Marly aqueduct — that crowning extravagance of the Roy-Soleil. It completed a picture which in its exquisite unreality, its warmth and glow, its richness, its stillness, seemed like the dream of a Claude Lorraine, expressed by that past-mistress of all art, — living Nature herself.

With a hasty yet a heavy tread, the tread of busy-minded, vigorous middle-age, Dr. Lebel came running up the stone steps from the garden-paths below, and emerged upon the terrace, — truly a most unromantic figure in the foreground of this glowing panorama. Through large-rimmed spectacles he flung one swift

look around him, and noting with impatient disappointment the empty wicker chairs, the deserted work-table, paused, snapped his fingers, and clacked his tongue. Then he glanced up at the façade of the house, all mellow in the sunshine that, year in, year out, had gilded it since the days of Louis XIV.; Luciennes, the most genial, the gayest-looking surely of those too few "stately homes" of old France left untouched by the furious, indiscriminate zeal of the Revolution.

Gone is the pleasaunce of Marly: nothing left to recall its splendid elegance but the marble-lined basin now used as a horse-pond. Gone is the palatial mansion of Sceaux: its very site lost amid ploughed fields and pastures, a few scattered statues, once the pride of its wondrous gardens, now serving as boundary-marks to peasant estates. Gone is Choisy-le-Roy, the miniature Versailles. Gone and forgotten every ancient seat of the great noblesse within striking distance of turbulent Paris, except by what seems almost a freak of fate, this Château de Fitzroy, or "Luciennes," as it is more generally known from the name of the nearest village.

On the crest of the western hills, midway between the heights of Versailles and the forest of St. Germain, within three leagues of the bastioned walls of the capital, Luciennes sits proudly, rare specimen of the country mansion such as old France loved to build; not only unmolested, but unrenovated and (yet more admirable fortune!) still in the hands of the family for which it was erected.

A simple and noble building rising to two lofty floors under a slate Mansard roof; lying between its court of honour and its terraced garden, in the middle of a park laid out two centuries ago by Le Nôtre, Louis the Great's own great gardener.

Most of the long windows, under their heavy stone pediments, stood open; and muslin curtains, lightly swaying to hardly perceptible airs, spoke of lofty and cool-breathing rooms within; upon stone coppices, in and out of curving wrought-iron balconies, up to the very dormers clinging to the bevelled roof, flowers gemmed the grey walls.

The Doctor ran his keen eye over the building and rested it upon a certain balcony of the right wing.

"Not a soul stirring," he muttered to himself. But hereupon his further advance was arrested by an explosive apparition of colour upon the balcony in question. In flaming reds and yellows, it seemed as if some huge tropical bird had alighted on the sill. Two copper claws were suddenly extended and snowy filmy garments flew out in clouds.

"*No soul indeed*, but the wholesomest *body* in the world," said Lebel to himself, "probably for that reason," he added cynically. "Hullo! Blanchette, hullo, my fairest of snowdrops," cried he, in a rough good-humoured shout. "Where is your mistress?"

A grinning copper face, shining beneath a yellow and red turban, was instantly protruded over the balcony flowers.

"Hullo, Doctor, honey!" The white teeth gleamed, "Missie very busy. Busy dressing!"

"Busy dressing?" repeated the shabby gentleman below; he stood with his legs apart and his mouth rounded to a whistle in expressive astonishment. "That is a strange hearing!"

The face in mid-air grinned till the vast lips could stretch no further.

"Telegram from Massa — Massa coming home, 'mediate. I 'low she be glad!"

Blanchette nodded triumphantly, again shook the delicate draperies, waved them like a flag of rejoicing and disappeared, followed by the Doctor's last call which rose crescendo to a bellow.

"I am very glad too. But, for God's sake, tell her I want her. It's urgent, my dove — urgent!"

M. Lebel pushed back his shapeless panama hat, scratched his grey stubble, and reflected. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he flung himself upon a high garden chair near the balustrade, and propping his cheek upon his stumpy fingers gazed out across the valley.

So deeply did he give himself up to contemplation that the fall of a sedate footstep behind him seemed to strike deaf ears; and it was only when a quiet voice sounded upon the breath of a sigh above his head that he vouchsafed any consciousness of its owner's large, gentle presence.

"Oh, beautiful France!" said the voice.

"Hein!" said the Doctor, just shifting his position so as to cast a good-humouredly impatient glance upwards. "You, Canon? I thought I knew the slink of a clerical shoe."

The Canon of Marly — Armand de Hauteroche would have been his name in the world, but no one in the district ever thought of him but as "our Canon" — the Canon of Marly, his silver head bared, stood a moment without answering, one hand — the "hand of a prelate," as the saying goes, chiselled as it were out of old ivory — lightly resting on the stone of the terrace balcony, the other upon the back of the Doctor's chair. His face, large yet etherealised, serene yet deeply worn, was turned full towards the luminous west, and his eyes gazed forth as if following some elusive vision. His cassock fell in fine lines around a portly figure to which the folds of the purple sash lent an added dignity. So exquisitely had these garments been brushed and mended that it would have required a very close inspection to discover that they were quite as ancient as the Doctor's rusty and shapeless frock-coat.

"In truth," said the priest, as if continuing his thoughts aloud, "the very fairest spot in the fairest land of Christendom! Of just such a beautiful corner of the world might Horace have sung —

> "'Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes
> Angulus ridet, ubi non Hymetto
> Mella decedunt. . . .'

They knew what they were doing, these Fitzroys of old, when they planted a home here." Then, bringing his glance back, and lightly tapping the Doctor's shoulder. "Even you, the boasted practical man, were quite lost in poetical admiration of yonder golden mists."

"Oh, yes!" grunted the other, sarcastically. "I could write a charming ode on the subjects of golden mists and agues; also on the loveliness of chattering teeth and livid skins. I have a few patients among those haunts of poetry. As to the famous Fitzroys of old, their terrace," he went on, warming to his grumble, and bearing down an incipient attempt at interruption, "their terrace — I will say this for it — is high up, and that is good for our bodies at least. And it looks away from Paris — and that may be good for what you are pleased to call our souls."

"What!" cried the Canon, "do I live to hear reviled the Temple of Science, the home of advanced thought, the City of Light itself? I thought it was reserved for narrow-minded individuals of my conviction to find fault with Babylon. . . . Ah, the terrible Babylon! . . . And yet, when I gaze forth upon her far away in the distance from my window, I see the spires and towers of her churches pierce heavenwards through the mist of her smoke, and I take heart of grace again."

"Well, Canon," said the Doctor, pushing back his chair noisily, rising and driving his hands into his waistcoat pockets, "whenever I look out in the direction of Paris, I see the elegant contour of the Eiffel Tower. It dominates your little spires, my poor friend, it thrusts its skeleton into the very clouds. Try and get a glimpse of the city, east, west, north, or south, without that monument of modern science jumping into your eye — I defy you."

"My friend," said the Canon, mildly, "the towers

of Notre-Dame these eight centuries have seen the rise and fall of many false gods — the Church will save France yet."

"Pooh! If there were a few more like you, I'll not say but what a score of honest, wholesome men might at least improve matters. But your comrades over yonder." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder and made a contemptuous grimace. Then, throwing himself into his favourite attitude, with legs well apart, he turned truculently upon his companion — "Now, what brings you here, I should like to know? This is not the begging hour."

"Indeed," returned the other, "you do well to remind me of the hour. I must see the Duchess at once."

He turned with some appearance of haste towards the house, but the Doctor irreverently arrested him by a fold of his cassock.

"Hey, hey," cried he, "not so fast! Where are you off to? The Duchess is coming. Lord, what youthful paces all of a sudden, my good fellow! Is not patience one of the canonical virtues? And besides," dropping his jeering note to one of semi-serious warning, "remember, if you please, that I am first at the box-office. Fall in in rear, my friend."

Thus adjured, the Canon turned with his unalterable placidity, and letting himself subside into a wicker chair, rested his elbows on the arms, joined the tips of his fingers and smiled upon his friend.

"So she is coming?" said he. "Then I will wait

— and take my place in rear. Well, that is nothing new. That is where you would always place us, is it not? But the last shall be first, it hath been said. . . . "

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders, and took a turn or two along the blazing geranium border, kicking up the gravel as he paced with the toes of his vast wrinkled shoes. At the third turn he halted before the Canon, and bent down to look at him quizzically.

"Oh, my good Canon," cried he, in tones of rough affection, "your precious mother, the Church, can flatter herself to have spoilt in you the making of a very fine — man!"

The Canon raised long drooping lids. "Oh, my dear Doctor," he cooed back, "the World, the Flesh, and the Devil can flatter themselves to have spoilt in you the making of a very fine — Christian. But," said the priest, comfortably, dropping his eyes again and crossing his feet, "there will be the greater rejoicing among the angels upon your conversion."

The Doctor started and snorted. The cleric chuckled to himself in the renewed enjoyment of a most familiar joke.

"Pooh," said the Doctor, blowing out his cheeks with ineffable scorn. "Sorry for those pet fowls of yours if that is their only prospect for a treat!"

There was a pause, and the gravel flew again under an irritable foot. Then both men furtively consulted their watches. The Doctor, wheeling round, caught the Canon in the act.

"Come, come," said he. "What brings you here? I know! You want that good woman there" — jerking his thumb at the balcony with his homely gesture — "to give more of her good money to cram some wretched infant's head full of spiders' webs about the next world, instead of bringing him up to be a useful member of this. Or some of those little mewed-up old maids of yours have sent you to beg for a new doll for their chapel. . . ."

Here the speaker interrupted himself by tripping against the overflowing work-basket in his restless bear-walk. He stooped, picked up between his finger and thumb a piece of satin vestment gorgeously worked with purple crosses, and surveyed it with great disgust.

"Look at that now — just look at that! A pretty thing for a woman to be wasting her time upon whilst she might be making garments for the naked." Dr. Lebel here shook the offending object in front of the Canon's placid nose. "Look at it," he repeated. "It is the very symbol of your estate. Oh, it's beautifully decorated, I grant you. It has taken time and trouble, and some intellect, to bring it to such perfection! But what is it for? That's what I say, what is the end of it? — God Almighty!"

The little man furiously dashed the piece of work into the basket and all but snapped his fingers in derision.

"You have said it," said the Canon. "The end is — God Almighty." His voice rose sonorously. He extended his right hand with one slow movement

in marked contrast to his interlocutor's ceaseless gesticulation. "We have an end," continued the Canon, "an immortal one. And this is where we differ from you. What is your end! You will say with magnificence: Humanity. Humanity? In other words, Corruption, Death, and — according to your scientific creed — Annihilation."

The Doctor stared with goggling, angry eyes through his spectacles and turned several scathing but chaotic retorts upon an eager tongue. The other smiled, and reaching out his arms, drew the work-basket to him.

"Besides," pursued he, gently, "may not our friend embroider a pretty thing now and again, were it only as a relaxation, after such work as this?"

As he spoke he produced from the recesses of the basket a knitted mass of coarse crimson wool and shook it out: a petticoat complete, of vast and hideous proportions, but a most comfortable promise of warmth.

The Doctor still glared. Then he suddenly snatched the garment from the Canon and began to roll it up with almost infantile glee.

"Aha!" cried he. "Did you there, at least, my friend! This is for my old lady with the sciatica."

The deeper note of the cleric's indulgent laughter mingled with the layman's cachinnations.

"Doctor, Doctor," cried the Canon, shaking a prophetic finger, "we shall see you on your knees yet."

CHAPTER II

AT the top of the steps leading into the house, framed in the darkness of the open doorway, stood the Duchess of Cluny, clad in white. Shading her eyes from the level sun-rays, she looked smilingly down upon the friendly belligerents. A large tan-coloured hound bounded past her, careered out upon the terrace, circled in a large sweeping canter round the gossips and returned to thrust his head under his mistress's hand. Both men started, with a look of pleasure on their faces.

"There she comes," said the Canon, rising.

"At last!" said the Doctor, as he swept his panama from his bristling grey head.

The Duchess came down towards them, walking rather quickly, and stretching out both her hands. The sunshine lit with gold the waves of her brown hair as she advanced bareheaded into the still, soft, scented air. She was a tall woman, with a classic breadth of shoulder and length of limb, with proud set of head contradicted by a gentleness of gaze that was almost timid.

The Duchess of Cluny (born Helen Church) was one of those rare flowers which, blossoming upon

the fine old Anglo-Saxon stock, seem, in the soil and air of the New World, to have drawn unto themselves a special perfection and vigour of beauty; one of these beings, rich in health, in strength, fortune, and looks, which America from time to time sends over to old Europe to revive some grand decaying race and fitly wear the coronet of some majestic title.

There was nothing that betokened delicacy in the creamy pallor of her cheek. There was nothing of insipidity in the loveliness of her face, which was saved from the dulness of perfection by one or two charming irregularities: a deep dimple on one side of curving lips that were ever inclined to part in a sweet eager way over the most faultless teeth in all the world; eyebrows perhaps a little too straight and thick, over child's eyes, deep grey, with pupils dilating darkly under the smallest emotion.

Every year of the well-filled thirty-five of this woman's life had added its touch in dignity and in a motherly richness of figure and expression; and yet, perhaps, the most noticeable thing about her countenance was an expression of almost girlish innocence.

The two men who now advanced towards her both looked on her, after their different kind, as one looks upon the dearest on earth.

"My good friends," she said, yielding her right hand to the Canon and the left to the Doctor. Then to the latter: "Ah," said she, "I see you have already been at my basket! Now what do you want of me?"

She released their fingers with a little friendly

shake, subsided into one of the wicker chairs, and folded her draperies round her.

"Oh, you come at the right moment, you two," she went on, with a new note in her voice, like a joy-bell. "What could I refuse to any one now? Cluny is coming home — coming home to-day!"

She looked from one to the other triumphantly. They were both very glad; she saw that, and she was satisfied. She did not realise that their gladness was all because of hers.

"I must not be selfish," she went on with a happy sigh. "What do you want?"

Eagerly the Doctor drew a chair beside her. "Madam," said he, extending his stumpy fingers oratorically.

"Indeed," began the Canon on the other side, with quite an unusual emphasis.

"No, Doctor, no," said she, smiling, as they abruptly halted and contemplated each other with discontent; "the Church first."

Hereupon the little man grew desperately sombre; he pushed his spectacles back on his forehead, screwed up his eyes and wrung his nether lip between an angry finger and thumb.

A shade fell upon the Duchess's face. Looking earnestly at him:

"Oh, is it as bad as that?" she cried. "Then, Canon, we must let him have his say first, for you know, when our Doctor plants his spectacles that way, it's a matter of life and death."

"But I, too," urged the priest, with gentle authority,

"am here upon a matter of the most immediate importance."

The Doctor exploded. "Oh, yes, of course — some hysterical washing-girl has worked herself into a vocation mania and requires an outfit, or something. Now, listen to me ——"

The Canon of Marly lived under a chastened ordinance, but he too was human: it was not meet the Church should give way to the laity.

The Duchess sat between the two estates with a placidity that showed her to be well accustomed to such scenes. Indeed, the smile with which she regarded them had something quaintly maternal in its indulgent patience.

"It is a most pitiable case," entoned the priest in her ear, while, now fairly roused, the layman bellowed on the other side:

"Bernard's girl ——"

Then both mingled their accents of wrath and sorrow in the same words: "Poor little Rose — dying! — in an outhouse!" They stopped dead short, and glared. After a second their faces relaxed as if by magic; with the same movement they clasped hands across the Duchess's knees.

"Oh! what an apostle lost to us!" murmured the Canon, audibly, as he half turned away to hunt for his snuff-box in the folds of his cassock.

"What a splendid fellow that might have been!" growled Dr. Lebel.

Helen had risen abruptly. "Stop!" she cried, "let me understand. Why, you are both talking

about Rose, then. Did you say that Bernard's child, our little innocent Rose, has come back — ill?"

"Alas!" said the priest, "no longer innocent Rose. Ah, that Paris!" sighed he.

"Ah, yes, Paris!" echoed the Doctor, and shook his fist in the direction of the east. Then, with unabashed inconsequence, he went on, glowering upon the priest: "She has come back fearfully ill, that is what it is. And her pious, confession-going, fasting father has turned her out to die. Betrayed by one man, condemned by another. . . . for that's the justice of well-organised society!"

"My God!" exclaimed Helen. "Betrayed, that child! Doctor, you must believe in a God, if only for the punishment of such crimes. If Cluny were here, how his generous soul would flame! And Bernard has cast her off . . . oh! that is cruel." Her lip quivered; tears leaped to her eyes. But she was a woman whose pity was prompt to action. "She must be brought here. Here we can take care of her." She laid her hand on the Doctor's coat sleeve, and turned an imploring face over her shoulder towards the priest. "Oh, my good friends, hurry! I would go with you, but she might be ashamed to see me — poor thing! Stay! I will send Blanchette: she has known her from a child."

She moved swiftly towards the house as she spoke, followed by her satellites.

"Yes," remarked the Doctor, looking with a fresh vindictiveness at his beloved enemy, "a negress,

there's one comfort, will remain heathen at heart till her last breath."

He broke into what was almost a trot in order to have the first voice in the preparations. But from the steps he turned again to jeer at the more dignified advance of the older man:

"I thought you would have run to the prodigal, Canon. Now mark, I won't have her preached at; she is not in a state to bear it."

The Church had the last word. "I only ask to come in," it said sedately, "where your science fails."

CHAPTER III

SEVERAL guests were expected that afternoon at Luciennes. On three several occasions the sun-lit, hitherto drowsy, courtyard had been filled with movement and clangour.

The barouche, the stout prancing bays and the fat first coachman in person, in fact, the equipage of great occasions, to start early for Paris and bring back Madame la Marquise de Lormes, her son, Monsieur le Marquis and party from the family mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain; the victoria to meet M. Favereau at four-ten, with the second coachman and the roans; English John to be at Rueil before five, with the Duke's own American trotter and the dog-cart, — such had been the orders of the Duchess.

It was not often that such an influx was expected at the château, and the stately placid routine of the establishment was pleasantly fluttered.

The hostess herself, immediately upon the speeding of her new charitable undertaking, had been moved into the unwonted fussiness of inspecting the guests' apartments for the second time. She had added certain pleasing volumes to the collection already awaiting M. Favereau near his consecrated corner

window; had placed a specially selected picture (of austere religious character) on the cabinet facing Madame la Marquise's canopied bed. In the apartment of the Marquis she had ordered the lighting of a small wood fire with a sudden recollection of that young nobleman's chilly propensities.

Upon the other hand, in the room destined to the Marquise's eldest son, by a former marriage — the American sailor cousin, fresh from the great wave spaces and the salt breezes — she superintended the flinging open of both windows, the removal of superfluous furniture as well as the laying bare of the cool parquet floor.

In her husband's room she lingered, but found little to alter. Here the most divining care had already been expended. She moved a vase of his favourite monthly roses, only to replace them in their first position. A little while she gazed dreamily at the full length portrait of herself, Carolus Duran's most delicate masterpiece, the only picture on the simple and lofty panelled walls; then gravely and anxiously she turned to contemplate the riper beauty imaged in the dressing-table mirror, caught the gleam of a white hair in the full wave upon her brow, and pulled it out.

In yet another chamber did her steps linger. This was a little room opposite her own apartment, all white and rosy (colours of innocence and happiness), all muslin and lace, overlooking the rosiest, most smiling and most flowered corner of the gardens — a very bower, one would say, for some young

princess! It was already known in Luciennes as "Mademoiselle's room." For more than a fortnight its preparation had been the subject of the Duchess's constant preoccupation. The household, indeed, were considerably exercised in their minds concerning the identity of its future occupant, more especially as Madame Blanchette, who seemed to be her mistress's only confidant on the subject, had gratified her fellow-servants' curiosity no further than by the remark:

"Missie want somethin' *young* about de house."

Here Helen seemed to find a thousand little touches to add; and only the grating sweep of the gilt iron gateway, followed by the crunching of wheels, aroused her from this work of supererogation to more immediate concerns. But the dreamy smile which it had called forth was still upon her lips as she descended the stairs in that inimitable swift advance of hers which never betrayed hurry, to greet her first visitor, M. Jaques Favereau, a minister of France, her oldest friend in that land of her adoption.

This was a tall, elderly, witty-looking man, with a grey beard clipped to a point, and a slight stoop from the neck emphasising the keen look of the short-sighted eyes behind a pince-nez. A distinguished-looking man with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour (in his case, it seemed, honour in the right place) peeping from the button-hole of his summer suit. A man of the world, who walked with easy tread between the assembled footmen into the great hall and swept his hat from his head upon sight of

his hostess with the affectionate gesture of one more than sure of his welcome.

"So, there you are, Favereau," she said, halting upon the last two steps of the stairs and extending her hand, which he raised to his lips and retained for a moment; whereupon, descending to his level and laying her left hand over his own, she offered her forehead to his salute. Then, hanging on his arm, "Come outside," said she. "Oh, I have so many things to tell you!"

In the outer world the flight of another hour had deepened the gold of the lengthening sunrays, shot the distant mists with soft mauves and purples, and evoked from the dim leafy bowers of the gardens the evening voice of thrush and blackbird.

"There is nothing in all the universe," said Favereau, sinking into a wicker lounge, "so comfortable as my chair upon your terrace, Helen."

"How good of you," she responded, as, settled among her cushions, she mechanically extended her hand for her work-basket, "to leave your great Paris, and your post at the helm, for our sleepy, quiet corner."

"Good of me!" he echoed, and laughed a little to himself. Then, dropping his glasses from his nose, and turning his short-sighted gaze upon her with a kind of tender relaxation that spread to all the muscles of his strung-up nervous face: "Why, my dear," he said, "you have re-established here a bit of our lost Eden. I turn my face towards it, from the turmoil yonder — turmoil indeed since the opening of this

exhibition — as an exile towards home. This place is my paradise."

"It is odd that you should use the word," said the Duchess. And, dropping the glowing strip of satin upon her lap, she lifted her hands to the laces upon her bosom. "That is just what Cluny said!" She drew from its hiding-place a thin blue sheet of paper and smoothed it with loving touch. "Listen: 'I return home to-day. Home to my paradise.' Fancy, in a telegram! Is he not a foolish boy?" She glanced up at her old friend as she spoke, with a pride of joy that was well-nigh virginal in its open simplicity. "And is not it good news for me? And are not you glad?" she pursued. "For, as I wrote to you, he did not think he could get back before another five days. It is a pity our estates are so much scattered," she went on with a little sigh. "Their administration calls him away so often. But I cannot wish him not to be a good landlord, can I?" folding the telegram once more and replacing it absently.

"Of course not," responded M. Favereau, gravely. And there fell a little silence.

This the man presently broke, briskly calling Helen back from some far-off dream in which, upon the mysterious passionate hymning of the thrush, her thoughts had wandered.

"You look very well, Helen," said he, "very well."

"How could it be otherwise," she cried, "when Cluny is coming home? Home-coming makes up for all. Oh, I am well: you see, I am so happy!

Dear old Favereau," she went on, stretching out her hand to him, "I hardly like to talk about it! One should have, I think, the modesty of one's happiness. But with you, you to whom, after all, we owe it, you who made us known to each other, I cannot have this reserve. You have seen for yourself! You know!"

Favereau gently laid her hand back upon her knee.

"Yes," said he in an unemotional voice, "I know, I have seen."

She did not seem to feel any lack in his manner; her face, under the glow of her thoughts, had grown radiant.

"Oh, Cluny is a man!" she cried. "You always laughed at me from my very childhood for my romantic dreams. You know how high I always placed my ideal of the man I could love. Ah! you can guess then what Cluny has been to me when I tell you, after all these years, that he has never once failed me, never once fallen from it. . . . Why do you look like that?"

Favereau started slightly, determinedly swept from his face by a kind wrinkling smile the unconscious gravity, amounting almost to trouble, which had settled upon it.

"I?" said he. "Oh, only for the old reason! You build too high, Helen, I have often warned you — too high for safety."

"Ah!" cried she, with shining eyes, "if Cluny for all these years had not surrounded me with the most delicate, the most untiring love, I should have

to worship him now for his last act of goodness to me."

Favereau clipped the fine bridge of his nose with his pince-nez once more and turned a quizzical inquisitive look upon her.

"Indeed? And what," said he, "is this wonderful new proof of our Edward's goodness?"

"That was one of the things I had to tell you." Here a shade of embarrassment overspread the eagerness of her countenance. She took up her neglected work and began to stitch with great vigour. After a few seconds she pursued hesitatingly: "It is rather a long story, and a sad one. And you do not like long stories. And you know you hate sad ones."

"How now!" cried he. "You have that sort of guilty look upon you that generally proclaims some more than usually outrageous St. Elizabeth of Hungary business."

He laughed, but she put up her hands quickly, as if to ward off a blow.

"Oh, don't say that," she exclaimed with a cry.

"My dear child ——"

"God took her husband from her," said Helen, in a sort of whisper, her lips trembling. "Oh, no, Favereau, indeed I am not a saint! And indeed I don't want to be a saint! Saints have such sad lives, and I am so happy!"

There was a short silence. M. Favereau, Minister of Public Worship and Education, took off his glasses, rubbed them between his finger and thumb and

cleared his throat. For a moment, it seemed, suitable words with which to continue the conversation failed him. Then he once more mentally shook himself.

"Come, Helen," said he, "confession is good for the soul!"

She glanced at him quickly from her work: timid eyes were hers from under the queenly brow.

"My old mentor," said she, "yes!"

CHAPTER IV

"HAVE you ever heard," said the Duchess, after a pause, and once more placid, smoothing out the vestment upon her knee, "of a Madame Cora May?"

M. Favereau jumped in his chair. "Cora May, hey . . . ? You don't mean *the* Cora May, la belle Cora, as they called her?"

"I think there was only one," said Helen, gently, as she threaded a new strand of rose silk.

Favereau sank back in his chair and began to gaze at the deepening blue sky with the air of one determined to be surprised at nothing.

"I have heard of the lady," he remarked at length.

"She is dead," said Helen, in her grave voice of pity.

Favereau still found interest in atmospheric contemplation.

"I believe," said he, "that I did read some edifying obituary notices."

Helen's needle halted in mid-air; she gazed dreamily out towards the gorgeous west.

"Very few people," she observed into space, "knew that woman as I did."

Favereau gathered his long limbs together with a jerk.

"Hein!" he ejaculated.

"I knew her heroic goodness," said the Duchess, looking steadily at him, with just a shade of severity.

"Aha!" said the man, clasping his hands over his knees and staring at her with a blank countenance.

"Ah! you may laugh if you like," she cried quickly.

"I?" interrupted he. "Laugh? Where do you see that?"

Helen's cheek flushed. She had the sweetest blood in all the world, but it was prompt to rise.

"I don't want to understand what you mean," she exclaimed indignantly. "I don't want to know into what folly, what misery the poor creature fell. She was impulsive, passionate. She was a desolate woman; she became desperate."

Favereau's eyes softened once again with a wonderful tenderness, as he gazed upon this most cherished child of happiness kindling in generous defence of an unfortunate sister.

"But, Helen," said he, after a little pause, in his cool voice, "where could *you* have met Cora May?"

"Ah, not where you would have met her, sir! In poverty-stricken hovels, in sad hospital wards. . . . What that woman did, unknown to the world, in the ways of charity, passes all I can tell you."

"So that was how you met," said Favereau, musingly. He sank back into his seat; and closing his eyes, seemed to fall into a deep reverie.

Helen threw a glance at him as if of apology for her heat of speech, and took up her work again. The pause that fell, filled up by the dreamy song of the thrush and the rising scent of the geranium leaves, was a lengthy one. Twice or three times the Duchess attempted to break it, but hesitated upon the choice of the right word. At last, stitching very fast, and without glancing up, she remarked in an elaborately matter-of-fact manner:

"The poor thing had a child."

Favereau half opened one eye and closed it again.

"Ah!" commented he.

"Listen, Favereau," said she, with a sudden pleading earnestness. "That mother had the courage to give up her little daughter before the babe could know her, lest any contamination should fall upon its innocence. The child has been brought up as an orphan, at some school in the provinces. The mother never allowed herself to see it, even as a stranger. Oh, am I not right in thinking that if there is atonement before Heaven, its gates were not shut to Cora May?"

"Who knows?" said the man, dreamily, without opening his eyes. "You at least will, some day."

"Her one thought then," pursued Helen, unheeding, "was her child. She had put by quite a little fortune for her."

"I thought," he broke in again, still in the same manner, "she died penniless."

"So she did, poor thing! She was too eager. It was through want that she herself had fallen: she

wanted her child, since she could do no more for her, to be rich, to be safe! She lost all at one stroke in I know not what speculation. And it killed her! Now we had not met very often. We could not have had much in common, of course; but we were attracted to each other, I think. She looked so unhappy!"

"That, of course, was sufficient to attract you!"

"I longed to help her, but she never spoke about herself. Only once, as we parted, she whispered into my ear, 'Pray for me!' A few weeks ago I was amazed to receive a letter from her. She wrote that she was dying, and would I, of my charity, go and see her?"

"And of course, of your charity, you went."

"Of course," cried she; and, throwing to the winds all diplomatic preparation for her difficult avowal, proceeded eagerly: "Oh, Favereau, it was the saddest thing I have ever seen! She was struck down in the very plenitude of life. In painfully drawn words, for she had hardly breath left to speak with, she told me of the child, of her own life. I held the poor creature's ice-cold hands, the chill of death was on her, but yet she blushed—blushed in her shame to the roots of her hair, wet already with the death-sweat. 'In my desolation,' she said, 'the thought of you came to me like the vision of an angel. You are rich, you are powerful, and you are all goodness,' that is what she said, you know. She said to me: 'Of your charity, will you save my child?'"

Favereau slowly opened both his eyes. "And of

your charity," said he, in the same lazy, cooing way, "you promised."

"Of course," she echoed impatiently. Then, turning brightly upon her friend, "I got all the documents, then and there. I left her, I think, in peace." She paused, then flushing, "The little one," she pursued, "was born in spring, so she told me, and the young father and mother called her 'Gioja,' because of their happiness then." Divinely deep grew the scarlet on the Duchess's cheek, but she looked steadily at her friend. "It was all very, very sad; he, the young husband, died in May, and she in time fell into profound poverty, and then — and then it was she became known as Cora May . . . and had to give up her Gioja."

Favereau was gazing straight before him. "Gioja!" he repeated musingly. "Joy, the most evanescent, the most capricious of all human emotions — the folly of trying to perpetuate it in a poor little human monument!"

After a moment Helen resumed simply: "The child comes home to-day."

"The child comes home to-day!"

Favereau sprang to his feet with an inarticulate sound suggestive of sudden choking.

"The child comes — home. My God, what madness are you planning!"

As he rose, so did she, and turned and faced him in beautiful defiance, their eyes nearly on a level.

"Ah, you men of the world," she cried, "that is always your cant phrase when any one has been

inspired to do some little deed of goodness out of the beaten track! Thank heaven my Cluny is made of nobler stuff!" She caught both his hands, and shook them backwards and forwards to emphasise her words. "Favereau, before even I had time to explain my wish to Cluny, to tell him what I knew of the mother of the child herself, he forestalled me. 'You want to have the little one here,' he said; 'very well, adopt her if you want to. We will give her a home, and when the time comes, we 'll find her a husband.'"

"Pray, my dear Helen," said the Minister of Public Worship and Education, recovering his self-control, "release my hands and allow me to wipe the drops of consternation, which the very thought of your rashness has started on my brow. Oh, I am not in the least surprised at your husband's behaviour: that is Cluny all over — inconceivably light-minded! However, it will not do either of you much harm, I dare say, to learn for yourselves that all your inspirations are not necessarily happy ones. After a few weeks' experimentalising with governesses, you will probably realise the inexpediency of turning Luciennes into an orphan asylum. No doubt you will find some excellent school for the embarrassing child."

The Duchess had dropped her mentor's hands as requested, and was now looking down at her own taper fingers. A cloud of embarrassment had dimmed her radiant confidence.

"The child?" she said, with a laugh that strove

to be airy. "Unfortunately, my old Favereau, the child is — is eighteen."

Upon hearing this culminating and crushing detail the gentleman's feelings became too deep for words. Casting on her one look of despair that was almost comic in its intensity, he turned away and began to pace the gravel with irritable steps.

Helen looked after him, half laughing, half apologetic. Presently she ran up to his side.

"And the little one is coming to-day!" she cried, with a sort of child-like glee at having at last exposed the full extent of her mischief. "And Aunt Harriet is actually chaperoning her, and I have prepared such a little nest for her, poor bird! And in fine, Favereau, my heart is so full that there is not room for a drop more. Oh, don't be hard on me, old friend!" she cried, changing her note. "Folly is divine sometimes. Can I not at least *play* at being a mother?"

The man stopped in his walk, laid his hands upon her shoulders, and looked down into her face with eyes at once fatherly, lover-like, and reverential.

"Play at being a mother," he repeated. "Why, my dear, you are always playing the mother. Is there any one of us, even your husband, to whom you are not most unwearyingly, most divinely maternal!" Then abruptly turning away: "But for all that," he said drily, "your plan is the most insane that even you ever plotted and even Cluny gaily abetted!"

CHAPTER V

"HULLO!" cried a high-pitched, slightly nasal voice from the topmost of the house-steps.

The Duchess glanced round, and her face lit up with merriment.

"It is Nessie," said she.

Favereau bowed profoundly in the direction of the new-comer, and waved a courteous hand.

"I am indeed fortunate," said he, in easy English.

"Hullo, I declare if there is not the Minister," cried the unmodulated tones. "How do you do?"

The little figure at the top of the steps waved in return a minute hand, fluttered a vaporous assortment of flounces, opened a large pink parasol and came forward towards them, tripping now and again in over-long skirts which were ruthlessly permitted to trail.

From the crown of her little dark head, elaborately tired, to the tip of her high-heeled, pointed shoe, miraculously small; in every line of the dusky face, wittily irregular, delicately pretty; in every line of the slim lithe figure, Nessie Rodriguez proclaimed herself American — American of the class of bewitching New-World women who, looking upon Paris as their paradise, are determined to take their

share of bliss here below and make sure that their garb shall never be unworthy of the beatific state.

With a final trip that threatened to destroy whole yards of wonderful fal-lals the little lady halted, extended the minute hand blazing with rings to Favereau's mock, rapturous salutation, while she herself bestowed a bird-like dart and chirrup in the direction of the Duchess's left temple.

"Now, Helen, what do you think of my new gown?"

As she spoke Madame Rodriguez shook out her skirts; and there seemed to be a ruffling and fluttering of feathers, followed by shapely subsidence.

"Paquin says," she twittered, "they must be an inch on the ground *all round.* How is one to walk, I should like to know? You are a man of taste, Mister Minister. (It's really delightful to see you!) What's your candid opinion on the new fashion? It is kind of silly, don't you think, to make people forget you have a foot?"

She chose her chair, taking possession with another inimitable whisk of draperies and an arrangement of limbs which brought into proper notice the swing of the miraculous shoe.

Favereau, his humourous face wrinkled with amusement, bent slightly to examine through his eyeglass the arch of embroidered kid.

"Could any man," he sighed, "forget that you had a foot, Madame?"

Nessie lifted her toes within the range of her vision with a slight kick.

"I wonder," said she, "if that 's a compliment?"

Bubbling with amusement, she shot a confidential glance at Helen, upon which her countenance suddenly changed. With lowered feet and raised head she turned sharply upon her friend.

"What 's happened to you, Helen? You 've got another face since this morning."

The light that only one thought had the power to evoke shone in the Duchess's eyes and smile. Her hand sought with unconscious caress the hidden telegram.

"I have had news," she said.

Nessie gave a little snort. "You don't mean to say the Duke has sent you another letter?"

"No; a telegram. He is coming back — this afternoon."

The sunshine of her joy so flooded this happy wife that even her familiar companion's ready tongue had to wait a moment on staring eyes.

"Well, I do declare!" she burst forth at last with the shrillest note of her high gamut. "Look at her, Monsieur Favereau! I always said Helen had a lovely character. What other woman now would wear a face like that, just because her husband 's coming home? And such a gown! My! for a husband! Now I have dressed smartly too; but that 's because of the American sailor cousin — one of the heroes of Santiago, you know — the new beau."

"An encouraging remark," said Favereau, in his gentle bass, "to make before —"

"The old beau?" interrupted Nessie, with a de-

lighted cackle. She tapped his shirt-cuff with her little jewelled finger, took a necessary breath, and started afresh. "Well, Helen's a real saint, isn't she? Now, what do you say?"

"I say," answered Favereau, drily, "that if Cluny is not a real saint, he ought to be."

The Duchess looked up from her work, and shot an amazed look at the man's countenance, — a countenance that was as superficially expressive as it was fundamentally secretive. She drew her brows together; her eager lips trembled over a rush of words, but the arrival in procession of what the majordomo presently announced as "le five o'clock" checked further intimate speech.

Nessie fell upon the cakes with an appreciation which for the moment necessitated her undivided attention. Favereau remained standing in the attitude in which he had risen to receive his cup from Helen's hand. Absently stirring the three lumps of sugar in the uncreamed mixture (his hostess knew to a nicety, and never forgot, the individual tastes of her friends), he watched the Duchess's face with an ever-gathering gravity.

Round and round went the little Russian enamelled spoon in the yellow Russian tea, though the sugar was long since dissolved; round and round went his anxious thought, and to as useless a purpose.

"*So serene, so untroubled, so untouched, so steadfast in all else, yet here so vulnerable, that even to question*

in jest the perfection of her idol suffices to bring this shade upon her face! Ah me! Angel, saint to all the world — woman, more tenderly woman than most to the man her husband! God guard us! — and I who made the marriage to give her happiness, out of my own poor heart!"

"Yes, my dear," resumed Nessie, brandishing a slice of walnut cake in the direction of the Duchess's bent head and resuming the original thread of her discourse, "you 're just too good for this world, that 's a fact!"

Helen looked up. "Do you want to make out," said she, with a little laugh, "that there is any merit in my loving Cluny? Oh, I am afraid the path of sanctity is steeper!"

Madame Rodriguez, who out of her slice had bitten a semicircle that bore unimpeachable witness to the perfection of her small teeth, here cried indistinctly, but with the greatest earnestness —

"Don't you try to climb any higher, my dear. No, don't you try! Men do not like to be made to live always on the heights, do they, Monsieur Favereau?"

Favereau swallowed his tea-syrup, and deposited the cup before answering. Then, drily —

"In great altitudes," he answered, "the atmosphere is perhaps rather too rarefied for ordinary lungs to breathe with comfort."

"That 's so. As for me," proceeded Nessie, "I always feel a kind of mountain-sickness coming

over me when I have been a week in the house alone with Helen."

The Duchess looked from one to the other of her friends.

"I don't think I quite know what you mean," she said, flushing.

"We mean well to you, my dear," cried the shrill mentor, and fell to emphatic speech, pointed by the most warning gesticulation of absurd hands. "We all know that you are an angel, and a saint, and have a halo growing somewhere round your head, and we know that the nearer the sky you are, the more at home you feel. But husbands — husbands, my dear, are mere human beings. If one wants to live with them happily, one must come down from one's heights."

"In fact," interrupted Helen, with a still deepening colour, "every woman must bring herself down to a lower level if she would please her husband. Is that your advice, Nessie, and is it — based on experience?"

Hardly had the words escaped her lips than she repented her, and stretched out a tender hand of apology to Madame Rodriguez. But that lady was of no such susceptible fibre.

"Mercy!" she cried. "Experience? No! I'd have been mud up to my chin by this time if I'd tried to live down to Rodriguez. One need not go after them into the swamps."

"Madame Rodriguez is a philosopher," said Favereau, beginning to choose a cigarette after a

dumb show of demand for permission. "Yes, there are middle distances. Those are the safest. Compromises for us all."

The Duchess flamed again with that quick, sweet passion of hers that was kindled only by a too sensitive generosity.

"Compromise!" cried she. "I hate the word. I hate the idea. What does it mean? Being false to one's best possibility. Slipping in between the wall and one's honour. A cloak to disguise treason, a kiss to cover a betrayal!"

Favereau looked at her kindling face with his sad, wise eyes.

"Compromise," he said, "my dear lady, is the cardinal condition of life's tenure. It is the safety-valve of social existence; the first lesson to be taught the child, the last consolation of the old man."

"I will have none of it," said the Duchess. "I would never be content with half an honour, half a love, half a happiness — I think I would as soon do nothing as only half my best. And so would Cluny," she added, after a short pause. "He is one who would as soon lose honesty itself as the delicacy of truth."

M. Favereau brushed an imperceptible ash from his immaculate grey knee.

Madame Rodriguez's bright eyes, after vainly endeavouring to catch his dreamy glance, became suddenly suffused. She sprang to her feet, and, fluttering to the back of her friend's chair, caught her impulsively round the neck.

"She's too good for this world!" she repeated then, shooting the words at Favereau over the pretty bronze hair and squeezing the white throat with her hands. "How in this universe you ever came to take up with an earthy little worm like me, well, it just beats me! But, after all, it's just because you are *you!* Just to think, Monsieur Favereau: I was a poor, unhappy little girl at school, — yes, I was, Helen, you know I was, — always in disgrace, snubbed by the grand French girls (because my pappa had made his own pile instead of finding it ready made), sent to Coventry by my own compatriots because of the crimp in my hair! Why, the poor dears, pappa and mamma, would insist on sending me to that convent, the Lord only knows! They'd set their hearts on seeing me in the beau monde, you see. And then Helen here, Helen, this blessed duck — yes, you are, Helen, and you always were" — with fresh pressure from the girdle of vehement hands, "Helen, the pride of the place, brought up by the greatest lady of the whole Faubourg St. Germain — my! how that terrible old aunt of yours, my dear, used to wither me through her eye-glass! (she was just American enough, you see, to scorn me twice over) Helen, the biggest heiress in Paris, sprig of the real old Virginia stock, she just took me up and floated me right off. That's Helen's way!"

"Dear Nessie," said the Duchess, pulling down the embracing hands and tilting her head back in the endeavour to stop the chattering mouth with a

kiss, "don't forget that, when our good Favereau brought us boxes of chocolate in those dear old days, if he had one for me, he always had one for you; and that you were as fond of holding forth to him upon my virtues then as you are now."

"Oh, bless you, it does not bore him now any more than it did then. They *were* dear old days, Helen. I can smell the convent smell this minute: incense and beeswax and whitewash, and the smoke of the little lamps. Oh dear!" She sniffed the flower-laden atmosphere and closed her eyes upon blue sky and sunshine.

"Oh dear!" echoed the Duchess, laughing with the tender regret which the most prosperous must fain bestow upon the pathetically innocent memories of youth. And, in company with her friend, she flew back in spirit to the past. "I can see the long convent room still — can't you? And the great long windows, and the one green tree."

"Oh, and do you remember," cried Nessie, with her delighted cackle, opening her eyes once more, "do you remember the day Sister Angelique caught you giving Favereau a kiss for his chocolates? Oh my! how shocked she was. And you said, in excuse, you had always done it. Ha, ha, ha! You never knew, did you, Monsieur Favereau? You never thought of noticing whether a little girl kissed you or not? But she cried three whole nights after your next visit because she was afraid you would think she had ceased to love you."

"I remember, I remember," said Helen, smiling,

as with half-closed eyes she dreamily swung in the rocking-chair.

"Lord, it's not likely you'd remember," said Nessie to Favereau.

Favereau glanced at her, and she stopped short. For in those sad eyes the whole tragic secret of the man's life lay suddenly revealed to her woman's wit. Her brain seized upon fact, and eliminated preconceived ideas with the rapidity of which only a woman is capable.

"What!" went her whirling thought, "he had loved Helen? Always, even as a child? This old Favereau! Pshaw! he was not old — but a little over fifty now. And he had not forgotten the last time that Helen kissed him. No, he had not forgotten it. Ah, my God, what a look!"

The tears again rapidly rushed to Nessie's eyelashes. To cover her emotion, her embarrassment, to keep Helen from a hint of her kind friend's pain — with the same feminine instinct that would have led her to bind up a wound — she plunged wildly into discourse again, vainly endeavouring the while to find her pocket-handkerchief among the folds of her ingenious robes.

"Well, that's Helen's way, anyhow, as I said. And she's stuck to me ever since, you bet. And when I go and make a fool of myself and marry that Rodriguez, and he treats me like a brute, and deserts me, and keeps popping up, pestering me for my money, I declare, if it wasn't for Helen, I'd go crazy."

She sniffed, wheeled violently round upon herself, and stamped her foot.

"Oh! where *do* they put one's pockets in these new skirts?"

Having, after diverse contortions, extracted a square of cambric, the minute proportions of which were chiefly occupied by a monogram, a coronet and an arabesque of embroidery, the ill-used wife rubbed her eyes perfunctorily, shook out her skirts, returned to her seat, requested another cup of tea, and disposed of it reflectively. Then, interrupting the conversation which had begun between Helen and Favereau — pleasant, desultory talk of two old friends, interesting only to those engaged, where a word conveys a whole train of meaning, and a look can finish a phrase — Madame Rodriguez delivered herself of the following important pronouncement.

"It is quite a pretty gown, Helen; the stuff is lovely, and the lace is lovely, and you look lovely in it. But, my dear, *where* did you get it?"

Helen looked down complacently at her creamy draperies.

"There 's a young widow in St. Michel," she began, when, with a shriek, the little lady broke in:

"I knew it, I knew it! Now, look here, is n't it too bad? My! what 's the good of being a Duchess? Now, Helen, I am not joking. Listen, Monsieur Favereau, it 's very serious. This sort of thing cannot go on. This shutting herself up; this turning her house into a convent, all prayers and good works; this constant talking of horrid poor people,

this adopting of mysterious orphans — you 've heard of the orphan, I suppose? — and, and" — her little pipe nearly breaking in its shrill rise of pitch — "and this getting of her clothes in the village!"

There was a dramatic pause. Helen laughed, and lay back in her rocking-chair, reaching for her work. Favereau, the picture of judicial gravity, blew entrancing smoke-rings.

"Now, Helen," proceeded her friend, with ever-increasing earnestness, "that Duke of yours is always going off by himself." She paused again, impressively.

"My dear," said the Duchess, with her smile of absolute content, "if he leaves home it is because his duties require him elsewhere."

Favereau carefully knocked the ash of his cigarette with his little finger, and indifferently surveyed, one after the other, his long thin feet in their perfect tan clothing. Thus he naturally failed to answer the comfortable look of amusement Helen darted at him; her mute, good-natured: "Is n't she absurd?"

"Well," cried Nessie, waxing ever more earnest under the stress of excitement, "I guess if that man were mine, I 'd never let him out of my sight."

She rapped the tea-table as she spoke and started a hundred clinks and jingles. But the Lady of Luciennes, unmoved, planted a stitch, and the Minister of Public Worship and Education apparently became absorbed in mentally debating the propriety of another cigarette. It is always trying to feel how

good proffered advice is, and how utterly it is wasted; quavers of irritability betrayed themselves in Madame Nessie's next chirp.

"You would buy all Doucet, my dear (Doucet 's your style, Paquin 's mine), if you had two sous' worth of sense. And you would go with your husband to all the shooting-parties and all the races, the yachting and ——"

"But, you see," interrupted Helen, "Cluny does not happen to care for races, you ridiculous child."

Nessie clapped her hands. "Oh, my!" she cried, with an indescribable blend of pity, experience, superiority, and exasperation.

Favereau closed his cigarette-case with a click, and leaning forward and looking intently at the last speaker with his contracted, short-sighted eyes, cried warningly —

"Madame Rodriguez, I would not frighten you for the world, but there is a wasp just behind your left ear."

Nessie sprang to her feet. Forgotten was everything but the hideous immediate danger. She beat the air with her useless scraps of hands, rent it with her very effective voice. The Duchess had to rise and help and soothe. Favereau was fain to seek for the invisible insect with the help of his eyeglass.

"It is gone, Nessie," said the Duchess. "You forgot," said she, rebukingly, to Favereau, "how terrified she has always been of wasps."

"I did not forget," he answered quietly. "Forgive me, Madame Rodriguez, it was the only thing

to do: the sting once given —" He paused significantly.

Fluttering Nessie became still all of a sudden. Her small face grew solemn. She shot a glance at Favereau, flushed, then saying, "Thank you," in a subdued voice, sat down with quite unwonted meekness.

During the short pause which naturally succeeded the agitation, there rose in the distance a whirring sound of wheels.

"Hark!" cried Helen. The pleasant murmur grew louder, with the unmistakable accent of approach. "Cluny! it is Cluny!"

She turned from them with the lightness of a girl, ran the length of the terrace, and was up the steps before even her volatile friend had time to exclaim.

"My!" said that lady, after a while. "Now, Monsieur Favereau?"

Thus challenged, he met her questioning eyes.

"Well?" said she again, and tapped her foot.

"Well, Madame?"

"What 's your opinion — your real opinion?"

Favereau clasped his long fingers behind his back, and took a musing pace or two.

"You cannot," said he, smiling then upon her in his charming way, "get the Ethiopian to change his swarthy skin, nor a woman like Helen to change her white singleness of soul. Moreover, Madame

Rodriguez, I am not sure that *any* change would be for the better."

"Oh, come!" cried she, indignantly. "Sir, I *know*, *you* know."

"Madame," he said, halting before her, and raised one hand with a certain rare gesture of command that was distinctly impressive, "pray understand I know nothing."

CHAPTER VI

THE worthlessness of the Stuart has been demonstrated to us by every impartial historian.

Recent discoveries, we are told, will shortly place before the world the true Mary Stuart in all her falseness and depravity, while ruthless pens have long ago scratched away the last shred of personal worth, consistency and manly honour from the pathetic figure of the Martyr-King; the best that honest English Thackeray can say for the second Charles is that he was not a royal "snob" like his grandfather; the very name of the second James is still tantamount to execration.

But fact and judgment work in vain. There will ever hang about the dethroned race a scent of romance more exquisite, memories of devotion more delicate, than any other house has yet called forth.

It is not that the breed was worthier; this has been but too amply proved. It is not, either, that it has been more unfortunate: we have invested the story of that Bourbon who laid a more deserving, a more innocent head upon the block than did our constitutionally decapitated king, with no such glamour. Other royal rulers have been deposed, disinherited,

exiled; but yet their name is connected with no poetic love such as that which the single word, Stuart, has still the power to evoke. Their personal charm must have been something irresistible.

Perhaps it was from his direct ancestor, James Stuart, that Charles-Edward Fitz-Roy, Duke of Cluny, inherited the peculiar fascination that made him an object of universal popularity, amounting in his own immediate circle to a kind of adoration.

"The king can do no wrong." Was it for a Stuart that this convenient aphorism was first coined? The Duke of Cluny was once described as one to whom it was possible to forgive everything. Perhaps if an attempt might be made to analyse anything so essentially elusive as "charm," a clearer idea of his personality might be given by the statement that, in connection with him, right and wrong seemed to lose their everyday meaning: whatever he did became him. I doubt whether, as a saint, he would have proved half as lovable as a sinner. Withal, his sins were those the world most readily condones — those which seem to spring from an excess of generous natural qualities: open-handedness, good fellowship, reckless high spirits, delightful contempt of consequences, thorough appreciation of women, wit, and wine.

Something there was of the melancholy of the doomed Stuart about this last of their sons (but nothing, his friends averred, of Stuart meanness and falseness); much, too, was there of their integral dignity. No one would have ever taken a liberty

with the Duke of Cluny, good companion as he was. At very first sight of him, it was impossible to mistake the distinctive type of beauty belonging to his lineage. The fine line of eyebrow curiously raised over the long lid, and its pathetic droop at each temple; the long full eye; the high delicate nose with its indefinable suggestion of scorn and the extraordinary sensitiveness of its thin nostrils; the grave mouth, with the delusive smile given by the light upturned moustache; the slender, beautiful hands — all this is familiar to our admiration from Vandyck's magic portraits and helps us to understand something of the personal power of the race. But what no brush could convey, what no pen attempt to describe, was the exquisite lighting up of the living face; above all, the extraordinary sweetness of the smile.

Jaques Favereau, nursing a dull fire of wrath in his heart against this profligate child of fortune, and Nessie Rodriguez, full of that wholesale condemnation (which, in a small and inconsequent mind, is so often the only alternative to correspondingly wholesale admiration), felt, each in their different manner, all adverse feelings dispelled by the first sound of the Duke of Cluny's voice.

Perhaps not the least of this Cluny's attraction dwelt in his voice: the most persuasive, the most sweet-sounding organ that ever man was gifted with; never raised inharmoniously above its pitch, it

seemed impossible to connect its accents with a vulgar or sordid emotion.

The master of the house smilingly advanced to meet his guests. To his arm clung Helen. It was characteristic of her that she made no attempt to disguise the absorbing joy that the mere presence of her husband brought to her.

"Madame," said Cluny, bowing over Nessie's eagerly extended fingers, "it is always a fresh pleasure to see you." He stepped back and cast a single comprehensive glance over the little figure.

"Never the same," added he, "and ever more charming!"

Delighted, she knew that Paquin's "*dernier cri*" had not been wasted here.

Then the Duke turned to shake Favereau's hand. "I am glad," he said. And he was glad. There could be no mistaking the warmth in voice and eye and grasp. And Favereau felt the last of his resentment die away.

"To the devil with this scamp that will not even let one be angry with him!" he cried impatiently in his heart.

"We never expected you," Nessie was piping. "A delightful surprise — oh, King of Jack-in-the-boxes!"

All the while she was settling a frill here and a bow there with entire self-satisfaction.

The Duke of Cluny turned his eyes, brightly happy under their melancholy lids, upon his wife.

"Ah! you see how it is, I could not keep away

any longer. The further we are separated, the longer we are apart," said he, laying his hand for a second upon the gentle one that clasped his sleeve, "the tighter grow the cords that bind me; till there comes the time when, faith! the tension grows so painful that I must fain come home."

Nessie stared at the speaker, enthralled by the magic of his voice and manner. A little dry cough from Favereau made her start perceptibly. She seemed to give herself a sort of mental shake, ruffling at the same time her fine feathers after her peculiar fashion.

"Well, yes," she responded, with a sudden accession of tartness, "when a man has got a wife like that at home, home is about the best place for him."

She flounced back into her chair as she spoke, an action which became a signal for the others to take seats likewise.

"How right you are," answered Cluny. So saying, he turned his wife's rocking-chair to the proper angle, and, in answer to the unconscious appeal of her eyes, installed himself upon the balustrade by her side. "Yet she has a fault, perfect as she is — a great fault in a wife: she makes absence so hard to bear."

Helen blushed rosily, like a girl.

The Duke tilted his straw hat to the back of his head and gazed across the garden slopes towards the ever-deepening west. Between him and the sky, in the absolute stillness, the opal smoke of the hamlets

below rose straight and slow; about the garden swards the swallows flew with mad darts and intersecting swoops. A bell, sweetened by cool distance, rang the Angelus with innocent village note. Some nearer sentinel took up the call, and the next moment the old deep tone of the chapel bell rang out the hour and warning within Luciennes itself. In the hush Cluny heaved a long, sighing breath, — the sigh of a man who gratefully draws into himself freshness and wholesomeness and peace.

He glanced down at his wife's bent head: as simply as the simplest child in the village below, Helen, at the call of the bell, was praying to herself. And as he looked at her he bared his head. Then he went on with his train of thought, speaking softly to the last echo of the dying chimes —

"When a man leaves a wife like Helen, he carries off with him a holy image, before which his little light is always burning, after the fashion of those good friends of ours, the pious Russians, you know. And it seems to him, as each hour passes away, that the colours of his *Sainte Image* grow more glowing, more beautiful, more adorable. Yet when he returns home the image is nothing — nothing to the reality!" He paused, took his wife's hand, impulsively extended towards him, and kissed it, adding dreamily, as if into space, "That is how it will be, I suppose, when the believer gains his heaven."

The Duke's poetic sentiments, as well as the accents in which they were delivered, were in as perfect harmony with the hour and the scene as the

tender serenade of the blackbird to the receding sun from the orchard below. But it must be confessed that Nessie's sudden explosion of admiration was notably the reverse.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I call that just lovely! I do believe if Rodriguez had ever made me one single speech like that, I should have forgiven him everything — everything!"

Favereau looked at the absurdly piquante face, the absurdly fashionable figure of the diminutive lady who yearned to pose as a *Sainte Image*, and broke into the first hearty laugh he had given that day. She, always charmed to promote mirth, joined in with her cackle, and the sunset spell was irretrievably broken.

Here a new sound of wheels without, accompanied by the comfortable solid trot of a pair of well-trained "family-carriage" horses, brought both hostess and guests to their feet.

Tripping as usual over her gown, Madame Rodriguez was the first to reach the angle of the terrace from whence the sweep of the entrance avenue could be overlooked.

"It's the hero," she cried, all eagerness, after vainly peering into the green below. "You know all about him, I dare say," she called over her shoulder to Favereau. "We are just bursting with pride over his exploits, we Americans. (I suppose he's heard of Santiago, Helen? One never knows with French people — they don't seem to kind of realise there's much of a world outside France). Oh,

here they are! There 's a puce parasol: that 's your cat-of-an-aunt — I beg pardon, Helen, Madame la Marquise de Lormes. And there 's another hat — a white straw mushroom. Oh, of course, that 's the little innocent, the mysterious orphan. But where 's my hero?"

"That 's my child," said Helen, and shot a glance of gay defiance at Favereau.

The Duke straightened himself from bending over the balustrade, ran his fingers through his crisp hair, and whistled softly to himself with a look of comical, good-humoured consternation.

"Faith," he said in an undertone to Favereau, "I had forgotten all about the orphan — what 's her name? Faith, I doubt if I ever knew the name! Well, it amuses Helen. What is it, my dear?" for his wife stood beside him, her hand on his coat-sleeve.

"Are you not coming to welcome our guests, Cluny?"

He glanced over the parapet. "*Ces messieurs* are evidently walking," he observed, "and, that being the case, Favereau and I will leave you to your first feminine expansion, — those embraces which our masculine awkwardness would inevitably hamper! *A tantôt.*"

She moved from him regretfully.

"I 'm coming, Helen," cried Madame Rodriguez, frankly bunching her inconvenient skirts and running after her tall friend as fast as her high heels would let her.

When he had watched her out of sight, Cluny fell into his wife's rocking-chair and lit a cigarette.

"Let us enjoy things for a few minutes more," said he. "How perfect it would have been if it were not for what Madame Nessie calls 'that old cat-of-an-aunt' and the rest of them!" He gave a little sigh. "What a pity that this carriage-load should break in upon us! I must be growing old, I think, for I don't feel any enthusiasm even to make the acquaintance of the American. It seems he 's a fine fellow though, and has been entrusted by his Government with weighty business in this Exhibition. As for Cousin Totol, I confess the youth's hoary wickedness has ceased to make me smile. And the orphan. Oh, one knows the orphan by heart already! '*Oui, Monsieur. . . . Non, Monsieur.*' Well, poor little soul, she can't be much in the way, and, as I say, it amuses Helen."

CHAPTER VII

FAVEREAU, absorbed in thought, his hands loosely clasped behind his back, his head bent forward on his breast, was pacing slowly up and down in the red sunset glow. A look of fatigue had fallen upon his face. It was as if some inner light had become quenched upon Helen's withdrawal.

He seemed to pay no heed to Cluny's discourse. But, with the placid egoism of easy friendship, the latter proceeded, raising his voice and speaking a little more emphatically, the while he luxuriously rocked himself and stretched long legs before him and long arms above his head:

"There 's not another woman like her on the face of this earth! Oh, this coming home to her, the restfulness of it, the sweetness! And never *banale*, *mon cher*, no more than good white bread, or a clear water spring, or the large blue sky itself can become *banal!*"

M. Favereau halted in front of the swinging-chair, and turned for a moment his abstracted gaze upon its self-complacent occupant, then he resumed his slow, reflective tramp.

"You made our marriage, dear old friend," continued the Duke, tenderly, "but it is no use trying to thank you."

The other walked to the end of the terrace, returned, drew a chair close, and sat down.

"Yes," he said; "I made this marriage, and I don't want you to thank me."

Both his tone and movements were so heavy, so unlike the man, that, with a shade of surprise, Cluny stopped his rocking, threw away his cigarette and half sat up to examine his friend's countenance. Favereau returned the look with a long, searching gaze.

"Edward," said he, then, "those were very pretty phrases you made to, and about, your wife just now."

"Phrases? I made no phrases. I spoke from my heart," answered Cluny, after a slight pause.

Again Favereau's eyes scanned the face before him with a long look. Then he gave a deep sigh.

"I believe you are speaking the truth. I have no doubt," he said, "that you are very glad to come back to Helen. But, does it not strike you that, for a man so conscious of his wedded felicity, your absences are strangely frequent and prolonged? Are you not afraid that it may one day dawn upon Helen that these are not always occasioned by your high sense of territorial responsibility and social duties? For that is, I understand, the official explanation."

There was a complete cessation of all movement from the rocking-chair. The Duke seemed struck

into as profound a meditation as the speaker had been a little while before. Even in the rosy light his countenance seemed to grow pale under its tan. But there was not a shade of hesitation in the frankness of his glance; not a shade of embarrassment in his manner when, at length, looking fully at Favereau, he answered him. The words, however, came slowly, with deep earnestness and emphasis.

"I can conceive," he said, "no greater misfortune than that Helen's peace of mind should ever be disturbed through me. I would do anything in the world to avert that."

Silence fell again. With an abrupt change of manner, the Duke lay back in his chair, resumed his oscillation and began to roll another cigarette.

Having thrown away his match and blown a cloud of delicate smoke, the world was once more illumined by his charming smile.

"Bless her," he said, "she would not believe an angel from heaven were he to try to shake her faith in me!"

Favereau rose stiffly from his seat, his face suddenly drawn with anger. The sturdy iron chair trembled under the weight and tension of his hand.

"And this," he said, almost in a whisper, "this is the confidence you deliberately abuse! Edward, you are a baser man even than I thought you."

He turned away as he spoke and walked to the end of the terrace with a dragging step, shrinking into himself as he went. His back now looked like that of an old man.

Cluny sat, staring after him with a blank look that was almost comical; then he sprang up and, hurriedly overtaking the retreating figure, flung both arms boyishly over its shoulders.

"I say," he cried caressingly, "what fly has bitten you this evening? You know I am not base. I don't say I am worthy of Helen — that would be absurd! I have my faults, of course —"

"Faults!" echoed the other, turning round upon him; and the ring of his voice, the look in his eyes, was so full of sad contempt that the Duke hung his head and dropped his glance, like a convicted urchin.

"Ah," said he, then, in a low voice, still looking to the ground, "Helen knows me better than any of you, in spite of everything. She alone knows the best of me. You, why, I think you know the worst. Now I stand between: a man, a mere man. Yet," he continued, stretching out a persuasive hand, "is not a man's best self the true one?"

"Edward, Edward, Edward," cried the elder, with a sort of groan, "these are but words. And that better self of yours — which God forbid I should deny! — knows they are but words."

He scanned the beautiful face, so extraordinarily youthful still, in spite of the silver streaks in the thick brown hair.

"Alas!" he went on, "I fear that the naughty boy whom I loved so much more than I could have loved a better one, will never die in you. I have been waiting, Edward, for the *man* — I have waited so long that I have lost hope at last. And one day"

— Favereau's lip quivered — "one day you will break her heart!"

He leant his elbow on the rough stonework and gazed across shadowy garden-spaces towards the misty glory.

Again Cluny's arm crept round the irresponsive shoulder, and Cluny's voice began to rise and fall in the obstinately averted ear in tones of pleading that were alternately boyishly sweet and passionately earnest.

"Don't say that! Look here, *mon vieux*, it's never too late to mend. Favereau! come, are you not a little hard on me? God knows I would not change my noble wife. No, not by a shade would I have her less exquisite. I will say this for myself, Favereau, she might have married a better man, easily. But there is not another man in the whole world that could understand her, feel with her, as I do. Come, you must acknowledge I have made her happy."

As the speaker became persuaded of the soundness of his own argument his voice grew gradually more assured. It now rang out almost in triumph, and the arm was withdrawn from its embrace to assist with fine gesture the weight of words.

"Come," he repeated, "you must acknowledge I have made her happy! Do you think, if I had ever hurt the most secret of her thoughts, the least fibre of her feelings, either as wife or as saint, she would wear round her woman's face that aureole of happiness?"

Favereau turned with slow unwilling eye, with stiff resisting figure, to meet the flushed triumph of his friend.

"On the surface, your arguments are unanswerable, my prince of easy sophists," said he, with a curl upon his lip, which was, however, not all unkindly in its sarcasm. "But let us just probe a very little below this fair surface. Have you ever asked yourself how long Helen's happiness would last if —"

"Stay!" interrupted Cluny, with a quick gesture. Then, staring thoughtfully at Favereau, "Let me finish," he said. "I suppose you imagine that I have been what is called unfaithful to my wife?"

Favereau clutched the young man's arm. "Do you mean to tell me," he cried, "that you have not?"

The husband hesitated a second, then he answered firmly:

"Never! — Never!" he went on, with an air of entire conviction, "with that better self of mine, that better self which is consecrated to her."

"Faugh!" exclaimed Favereau, pushing Cluny from him with an angry movement. Then running his eyes over his friend's figure and clasping his own hands behind his head, with a gesture of utter discouragement. "Incorrigible!" cried he.

Cluny, with his imperturbable sweet temper, betrayed no resentment.

"My dear Favereau," he said, pleading once again, "be reasonable. Here, let us sit on this

bench. The smell of the honeysuckle is entrancing — and look at that sunset! What a good hour this is — the very hour for friends. Light up again and don't look so gloomy. I am not such a bad fellow, after all. (Well, if you will not smoke, I will.) . . . I ask you again, have I not made her happy? And is that not the chief thing after all? You must admit — you are a man of the world — that there is not a man existing that is, through and through, worthy of her. There is not a man, as man is made, man with human weaknesses, human passions, who could keep himself, year in year out, upon her level, without once betraying the clay, without bringing disillusion upon her. You know that. I could not."

Favereau gave his dry commenting cough.

"As well," pursued Cluny, waving his unlit cigarette (he was not in earnest about his smoking, after all), "as well expect a human being, however wedded to holiness, to spend his whole existence in a church! A man must out into the world, even if it be a dusty, sinful world. I have felt that I must out into the world, devout worshipper as I am. I have to leave the sanctuary now and again to keep the shadow of my mere humanity from falling upon our perfect union — the union of my better self and her."

This time the listener gave a short laugh, flung himself back on the bench and crossed his legs. Leaning his head against the back, he gazed upwards into the deepening blue and breathed, sighing —

"Words, words, words!"

"Well, after all," then cried the other, with the first heat he had shown. "What is it you reproach me with? What is it? Where is it I have failed? What crimes do you think I commit when I leave her? *Mon Dieu!* of what importance are the relaxations of the man of the world, the man of honour, be it understood, that you should think them, to-day, worth all this frowning? These things have no existence, my friend. Or rather, they cease to exist the moment they are passed. Words written in water, pictures on the sands. Come, Favereau, are we not Parisians? If I have taken a cup of tea in the boudoir of *celle-ci*, or cracked a bottle of champagne at the supper of *celui-là;* if I have gone to Longchamps on the drag of my good friend *Tel-et-tel*, who likes Athenian company, or if I have lost a few nights' sleep and a few *rouleaux* of gold round the Mirliton's green tables, what does it all amount to, in fine? . . . Pleasures without a morrow, without a memory. The glass of wine a man drinks in good company, the jest forgotten in the laughter, the merest nibble at the forbidden fruit, the fruit that grows in that secret orchard which every man (I mean every man of the world, of our world) has at the back of the open garden of his life. Why, Favereau, the very savour of that wild apple, tart and inferior as it is, is sometimes needed to bring a man to a right understanding of the value of better things."

"Knowledge of good and evil, in fact," said Favereau, gravely jeering. "But your idea, my

dear Edward, is hardly novel. The experiment, we are told, was made long ago."

"And am I not a son of Adam?" said Cluny, petulantly. "My God! and you too! Ah, come, don't tell me you have never slipped into the secret orchard and that you have never known the taste, sweet and acrid, of the forbidden fruit! Oh, you have not been immaculate yourself!"

Favereau straightened himself and fixed a glance of the saddest severity upon Cluny: the ghosts of the errors of his youth rose up before him.

"I have not," he said. But the next moment, under the pulse of a surging thought, his eye flashed, his face became suffused, the veins on his temples swelled. "I have not," he repeated, throwing the words at his companion like an overwhelming indictment; "but I have not been married to Helen!"

There was a moment's silence. Surprise, succeeded swiftly by an ingenuous shame, showed itself on the Duke's face. Favereau, leaning his elbows on his knees, dropped his crimsoning forehead into his hands. For fifty-six years this man's blood had coursed and fretted and toiled at the service of a mind and heart that had no pity on self; but it was young enough still — that is, strong enough and weak enough — to work its own torture.

"Secret orchard!" he repeated, "Great God!"

"And was it for this I gave thee up, oh my beloved!"

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN the Duke next spoke it was in an altered manner.

"You are right," said he, "a thousand times right; and I am wrong. I will give this folly up, as there is nothing in the world I would not give up to save Helen one tear. Oh, believe me, these are not words this time! Or rather it is one word, my word of honour. You do believe me?" He stretched out his hand for his friend's clasp. "Have you ever known me break my word of honour, Favereau? I 'll never leave her again. I 'll try, I 'll try to be really what she thinks me."

His whole soul thrilled in his voice. Then, as Favereau made no answering motion, the outstretched hand trembled a second and dropped. After a deliberate pause the other spoke.

"It must have required something more than — what was your pretty phrase? — the glass of wine in merry company, the jest forgotten in the laughter, to bring you to this."

There fell a curious silence upon the Duke. Leaning forward, both eye and tone as keen, as

searching, and as merciless as the surgeon's lancet, Favereau went on:

"In what category in his scheme of those harmless — what am I saying? . . . of those rather meritorious, 'pleasures without a morrow,' does the Duke of Cluny place the young lady with the flaxen hair?"

"My God!" said Cluny. The bench shook under his violent start.

Favereau stopped short: the first cut of his knife had laid bare the hidden sore.

"My God!" said the Duke again, and every drop of blood ebbed from his face. "How did you know?"

"Everything is always known," returned Favereau, with his sad, cold glance.

"My God!" repeated Cluny once more, this time almost in a whisper. "Who told you? Do others know?"

"It was spoken of, my dear fellow, at the club. It may yet be talked about in the drawing-room. Sit down, Edward. Why this agitation? You have so successfully (I will again borrow your picturesque form of expression) cracked a bottle of champagne with this one, drunk an intimate cup of tea with that other one, that I do not think *your* reputation is likely to suffer so very much." Then, changing his tone of icy bantering to one of fierce resentment, "But, Helen, Edward, Helen? Listen: I had to stop Madame Rodriguez's mouth just now. Oh! all out of her love for Helen, she wanted to advise her how to keep a husband at home. Great

heavens! You are not an absolute fool. To have such happiness — such happiness, my God!" — his voice failed him for an instant — "and to jeopardise it, for what? for the sweet acrid savour of your secret orchard fruit! Faugh!"

Cluny opened his pale lips to speak, but could find no word.

"The devil, man!" broke out the Minister, with a fresh gust of anger. "Do you think that you, Duke of Cluny, can walk the sands of Narbonne with a discreet conquest and pass for an unknown *bourgeois* by the simple expedient of anonymity? I have warned you before. It was bad enough, in society. But this business! Come, who is that yellow-haired girl? Where is she now?"

"I don't know," exclaimed Cluny, with a goaded cry. "I don't know. I don't want to know. I'll never see her again. I only wish I never had. Oh, it was the most devilish pitfall!"

He sprang to his feet, took a few restless paces, returned and flung himself down again beside the still figure of his friend.

"Pshaw!" said he, with a laugh that rang rather tremulously, "I declare you terrified me! My good Favereau, I might have remembered your talent for taking everything connected with matrimonial obligations in the tragic mood. Oh!" — stopping with a quick gesture the anticipated crushing retort — "I don't want to defend myself any more. You are right, more right, perhaps, than you have any idea of. Favereau, a fortnight ago, had you preached

me your sermon, I could have laughed, and would have laughed, in your face, because, believe me or not, for all my folly my conscience was then clear. Now. . . . Well, now I have had a lesson. Great heavens, and what a lesson! Oh! I can never tell you, for I can never explain to myself, how this thing came to pass with me."

"*Facilis descensus*," muttered Favereau between his teeth. "Alas, my poor friend, the explanation is so easy!"

"But it is done with, thank God, it is done with!" cried Cluny, moving restlessly. "I have not one moment's uneasiness on that score. Helen can never know. She 'll not credit idle gossip . . . and with me always by her side . . . I 'll never risk myself away from her again. Reassure yourself: I 've had a lesson!"

"My dear Edward," said Favereau, and there was not the least accession of warmth in his accents, "when I began this conversation to-day, it was in no very comfortable frame of mind. But my forebodings were nothing to the anxiety with which your present attitude fills me. It must have been a serious tripping to have produced this fervour of penitence. I have heard it said," he went on cynically, "that penitence is merely a higher sounding name for fear of consequences."

Cluny laughed nervously. "Not with me," said he. "There is not a chance, not the smallest probability of any consequences; I mean of its ever reaching Helen's ears. And after all, that is all I care

for. It is, and will remain a matter without a morrow . . . except as regards the warning to myself. You shall judge. Let me tell you."

The elder man raised a deprecating hand.

"I should like to tell you," insisted Cluny in his boyish way. "The confession will set a seal upon the compact I have just made." And then he added, with naïve egoism, "It would be a great relief to me that you should know."

Favereau made a reluctant gesture of assent. Propping his elbow on his knee again and his chin on his hand, shading his face but turning an attentive ear, he prepared to listen.

Something in the weary resignation of the attitude struck his companion with humourous recollection; he gave a quick youthful laugh.

Within the house, passing an open window upstairs, Helen caught the sound and paused a second, with smiling lips and warmth at her heart. To hear Cluny laugh was, for her, the sweetest music on earth.

"Evidently you have missed your vocation," the Duke cried. "What a famous father confessor you would have made! Oh, that attitude, even to the sigh of preparing patience! Our good Canon himself could not have done it better."

But M. Favereau did not deign an answer; the melancholy eye looked the despairing summing up of a few minutes before: "Incorrigible!"

With recovered earnestness the Duke started on his story.

"On my way to d'Entragues' yacht ten days ago — Helen knew I was going — at a cross station, just as the train was moving off, there was thrust, panting, upon my solitude, almost thrown in by a fussy guard, another traveller, a girl. She looked so fresh, so simple, so young, that I assure you my first impulse was absolutely paternal. I helped her to settle her humble belongings, that were scattered all over the place; I closed the window for her, threw away my cigar, thinking, as I scanned the modest face with its downcast eyes, that I had never seen a prettier type of innocent girlhood. She had light curls, tied back with a riband. She had that wonderfully milk-white skin that goes with such pale hair, and lips like a folded flower."

He paused for comment; there was none. Whereupon, with a shade of effort, he proceeded —

"She prattled me, between bashful thanks, a little tale: how she was going on a holiday visit, how she had missed her train, her chaperon — what do I know! She was too shy, it seemed, to venture a glance at me the while. What could I do, but, at our common station, help her with her luggage, see her into a fly? Just as we were about to part (there was not, I swear it, there could not have been a shade of ulterior thought in my mind) as I stood lifting my hat: . . . '*Adieu, Mademoiselle,*' . . . the most fatherly, the most innocent of men! Just as she was driving off, I say, she suddenly leant for-

ward, and for the first time raising those modest drooping lids, looked at me full in the face. And in her eyes I saw — I saw *the devil!*"

Here came a moment's ominous silence. The father confessor made an uneasy movement. But he merely said, his face still shaded:

"Edward, I had rather you kept your story to yourself."

"Well," pursued the other, unheeding, "I should have been less than human if the extraordinary contrast between the childlike innocence of the girl's whole appearance and the diabolical meaning and knowledge in her eyes — those windows, we are told, of the soul — had not piqued my interest curiously. Which lied? The child-like modesty, or the brazen challenge?

. . . . . .

"I swear I did not seek her out. The devil was in it all! D'Entragues had to hang about the harbour: day after day not a breath of wind — we were frequently in the town. Favereau, I met that wanton child again and again! Now she would be with friends, quiet, respectable, dowdy people they seemed. Now she would be alone, innocently gazing into the waters from the pier; or I might come across her stitching, oh so industriously, some little bit of embroidery in a retired corner of the public gardens. But always she contrived to throw me one of those devil's looks. At last one evening ——"

"Edward," interrupted his friend, straightening himself, and speaking this time with marked deci-

sion, "I had rather you kept your story to yourself."

"Ah!" cried the other, wounded, "when I was a boy, you never refused to listen to my troubles."

Favereau looked round at him with a troubled glance and a heavy sigh, and muttered:

"You have got your innocent boy's eyes still." Composing himself once more to resignation, "Well, go on," he said.

"We spoke," said the Duke, in the disjointed phraseology of a difficult confession. "The enigma had haunted me too long. I — I felt I must solve it. I was devoured with curiosity, unholy if you will, to know which lied — the mouth, or the eyes. We spoke, then. Oh, that hateful pier, in the dusk, with the lapping of the water and the sickly smell of the green sea-slime! And the face of the little temptress, as pure as a white flower against the yellow sky, and oh, those eyes, those eyes! I tell you, man, they had something hellish in their power. And I believed the eyes . . . not the mouth! It amounts to this, before heaven: I was not the seducer. . . . And yet, when too late . . . Oh, old friend," he went on, "do not be too hard on me!"

Too hard on him! The same words that, but an hour before, Helen had used when sweetly pleading forgiveness for an over-good deed. Favereau could have groaned aloud.

"As you blame me," urged Cluny, "consider the ethics of our world. You yourself have laughed, in your day, at the virtuous young man. Have we not

all been taught, with our first cigarette, that a man may be anything, in his relations with women, rather than a Joseph? Why, you yourself, I 'll stake my life, would secretly prefer to be dubbed Don Juan!"

"Surely," said Favereau, with a withering smile, "never was there one more ingenious in finding good reasons for evil deeds! I will not remind you of the obvious proverb, Edward. All this, however, is very unprofitable discussion and I cannot see what satisfaction your confession, as you call it, can bring either to yourself or to me. You proceeded, on those shores of Narbonne, to solve the enigma, I presume? It is to be hoped that at least the haunting of the . . . problem, is laid, and well laid."

Cluny arrested his friend as he was about to rise.

"On the contrary," said he, "I am more haunted than ever. Ah, no," in a sharp tone of pain, reading the expression of his friend's face, "not in that sense! But — how shall I tell you? It comes upon me as it did then, like a nightmare, too horrible to be real. Perhaps her story *was* true; perhaps she *was* the innocent school-girl after all!"

"The devil!" cried Favereau, springing to his feet.

"The devil incarnate in a girl's soft frame! We were but a day at that cursed place. Oh, she arranged it all! How could a man have thought, have dreamt? Yet all at once she said something and the awful doubt entered my soul. I was fright-

ened. I had but one thought: to extricate myself. Yet, believe me or not, man of the world as I am, I was the entrapped one."

"The woman tempted me," said Favereau, with a curling lip. "Oh, true son of Adam! Bad enough to blame the woman, but what of blaming the girl?"

"You are severe," cried Cluny, who flushed and grew pale.

"Severe!" echoed Favereau. "I have not your gift of language, Edward. Throughout your tale there is but one word that rises to my lips."

"Helen! yes." The cry came from Cluny's very heart. "I assure you, Favereau, I nearly went mad."

"Very likely," said Favereau, icily. "Meanwhile, what did you do?"

"Do?" said the other, with a sound between a laugh and a sob. "Do? I fled! I invented an excuse for d'Entragues and I fled that very day. Where that strange creature had been brought up, what companions she had had, what books she had been fed on, what evil strain ran in her blood, I can only surmise. At times, a word, a look, and she opened a vista of unconscious depravity, before which I stood appalled, *appalled!* The next moment—" He looked with a set face at Favereau and in a lower voice added: "Why, she thought I was going to marry her, Favereau! She did indeed. Don't look at me like that! 'T is I you should pity. I tell you, with such as she, her fate was inevitable.

. . . I explained to her that there were insuperable obstacles to our union. I have not seen her since. I sent her a necklace of pearls. Oh," he pursued, as if wildly endeavouring to convince a loudly rebelling conscience, "there was not one gem on that string but would suffice to dry all her tears!"

Favereau crossed his legs; folded his arms. "And do you flatter yourself," he asked very quietly, after a pause, "that she cannot run you down?"

"Impossible," cried the Duke, eagerly. "She has not the remotest idea who I am. She knows me only as Monsieur Le Chevalier. It is ——"

Under Favereau's steady look, Cluny became troubled, hesitated, stammered.

"It is a name I, a name, oh, hang it all! a name the inferior self sometimes assumes."

The Minister got up with great deliberation, buttoned his coat, shook down the folds of his trousers below the knee, brushed his sleeve, and taking up his hat from the bench-corner upon which he had hung it, placed it at a very exact angle on his close-cropped head. Then he began to walk towards the house.

"Where are you going?" asked his friend, in a humble voice.

"Anywhere," replied Favereau, without turning his head, "away from you."

"Have you nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing."

Like a chidden child, Cluny stood and stared with dejected expression after the retreating figure. At

the foot of the steps, however, the elder man hesitated; then, after a second's reflection, wheeled quickly and came back. Placing both hands on Cluny's shoulders, he gazed at him, a whole world of angry affection in his eyes.

"It is no use," said he. "However my judgment condemns you, Edward, my heart cannot cast you off. Alas! it was right," he went on passionately, "that the world should have shaken the yoke of you Stuarts from their neck. It is good that you, almost the last of them, are childless. It is right that you should die away, as you are doing, all of you, root and branch. Your race is a scourge upon humanity; people will love you with the love that passes the ordinary love of mankind; and so long as there is a sprig of you left, you will go on betraying that love. Faithless to your wives, to your mistresses, to your friends, to your own better selves, and yet, forgiven, beloved, *beloved* in spite of all and through all!"

He paused again and contemplated with conflicting emotions the downcast face before him; then, with an abrupt change of tone:

"This is your last escapade?" he demanded. "You give me your word?"

The Duke raised his eyes, full of sad pride. "I don't give it twice," he answered.

"Well, amen, then!" cried Favereau. "Amen to the good resolve. And let the past be buried!"

He clasped the other by the hand. The sun, through an arch of the distant aqueduct, dipped be-

hind the sky line. The sudden, mysterious twilight breeze awoke and shook the trees. A storm-cloud had gathered upon the radiant west. A chill, a trouble, a dimness seemed to fall upon the gilded world and upon Favereau's boding heart.

CHAPTER IX

"WELL," said Nessie, "you are a nice pair! Are n't you downright ashamed of yourself, Duke, to leave poor Helen to bear the first charge of the invasion all alone? Oh, my! that grand old aunt of yours is in a rich temper to-day. I can tell you. And it all fell on Helen, of course. And you, with that devoted friendship of yours, Mister Minister, why were n't you at least around to attract a little of the electricity in another direction?"

Nessie, with the most becoming lace scarf twisted about her little dark head, flashed a smile and a mischievous dancing look from one man to the other.

The savage and the man of breeding, the highest and the lowest in the scale of humanity, have this at least in common: the art of disguising their emotions. Not even Nessie's sharp eyes, not all her keen perception could discover a trace of the storm that had just shaken these courteous, easy-mannered gentlemen.

"Poor dear Madame de Lormes," she proceeded, delighted to monopolise the conversation. "I feel sorry for her this evening, for it must be admitted that fate is pretty hard on her. Why, that woman

has been labouring these thirty years to turn herself into a perfect French Marquise of the old genuine stock, and didn't she just succeed in making herself more Faubourg-Saint-Germainy than the Faubourg itself! And didn't she produce as perfect a specimen of your modern Parisian monkey-on-a-stick as any other old cat of the region could do!"

"I admire," said the Duke, lightly, "the correctness of your natural history illustrations."

"Well, I guess you take my meaning all the same. It's true to life, anyhow. Say now, isn't it hard on her, poor soul, after all these years that the past should rise up against her in the shape of a sturdy American son, a kind of living testimony of the two errors of her youth: I mean of having been born under the Stars and Stripes and of having wedded in her salad days the late forgotten Septimus P. Dodd of Philadelphia. And to hear yourself called 'mother' and 'old lady' in good fresh Yank! He is a very fine man," said Nessie, after a slight pause, with her head on one side. She gave a trifling sigh.

"What, have they arrived?" cried the remiss host.

"Oh, they'll be out here in a minute," said the lady, arresting him with her vivacious little hand. "I dare say they'll forgive you for not being there to embrace them: I received them," she explained coquettishly. "Helen was towing the old lady to her room, and doing something to trim up that ridiculous orphan. Oh, my dear Duke, what an absurdity! What are you going to do with that funny child? Why, she could neither open her

mouth nor her eyes. And as for her hat! Well, I was just taking a turn towards the rose-garden (I always say the birds and the sunset here go way ahead of the garden of Eden) when I saw in the path below a Trilby hat and as fine a pair of shoulders as ever walked out of Harvard playground. 'That 's my hero,' thought I to myself. And beside him there were a pair of cuffs and an eyeglass and a jockey club tie, and something just holding them together. 'That can only be the noble Marquis de Lormes,' I knew. So I waited for them of course, and we had quite a nice little conversation. Our Marquis did the introduction, Mirliton style. '*Tiens*, Ma'ame Rodriguez! How do? *V'là l'Américain*. My little brother! A famous type, eh? Oh yes, we preferred to *walker*. When the train *stoppa*, my faith, I said I 'd rather foot it than to sit opposite *Maman* in the family *berlingot!* Al raight!' . . . And 'the little brother,' looking at him the while as a big Newfoundland looks at a yapping terrier, not certain if he 'll wag his tail at him or crush him with his great paw. Well, I tell you that American cousin is a man! He 's got the breath of the sea about him. And it did me real good to feel the grip of a hearty American hand again. Ah, here they come!"

There was the murmur of voices: a deep complaining contralto, an indeterminate falsetto, and a few notes from a fine unmodulated bass.

Large, heated, injured, supported on either side by her sons, the Marquise de Lormes made her appearance at the top of the terrace steps.

Under the formally waved bandeaux of sleek iron-grey hair, her face retained, in spite of age, the traces of a high-nosed, severe, majestic beauty. Her figure, arrayed in vestment-like garb, was less well preserved; but its proportions were so magnificent and carried with such dignity that, in the average mind, criticism was sunk in awe.

She rarely spoke but on the breath of a sigh. Her French was peculiarly deliberate, ultra-classical, and richly Parisian in its rippling of *r's* and breadth of *a's*.

On the right the Marquis duteously supported her massive hand upon his little twig of an arm. On the left, in almost ludicrous contrast, rose the broad shoulders and bronzed head of the American.

"I shall feel better in the open air," complained the contralto.

"Famous oven-weather to-night," proclaimed the falsetto.

"Tropical quite," commented the bass, with a good-humoured note of mockery.

"My dear Aunt!" cried Cluny, advancing with his perfect grace of courtesy, and stooping to kiss the fat dimpled hand extended to him.

"Ah! my poor Charles-Edward, how do you do?" she sighed, and, swaying forward, deposed a regal salute upon his brow. Thus might two crowned heads meet and greet.

"Tip us your flapper, old horse," said the Marquis, cheerfully (in an elegant French equivalent).

Now the Marquise closed her eyes, indicated with a faint gesture the figure behind her, and after com-

pression of the lips and slight convulsion of the throat, observed —

"Your cousin from America — my son, Mr. . . . Dodd."

"Sir," said the sailor, in answer to his host's cordial words of welcome, "I am glad to make your acquaintance." And the Duke forthwith had an experience of the genuine American grip, and was not unconscious of what Nessie had aptly described as the fresh sea atmosphere.

"Take me to a chair," moaned the Dowager. "My knees are trembling."

She tottered a few steps on Cluny's arm, shuddering as, behind her, breezy accents that recalled deliberately forgotten associations, remarked that "the old lady was sort of bowled over by the thunder in the air."

As the group advanced towards the modestly retiring Favereau and the smiling Madame Rodriguez, the fainting Marquise recovered sufficient life to make a play of eyeglass which as witheringly ignored Nessie as it marked her companion.

"Do I see Monsieur a — Favereau?" she inquired.

The Minister of Public Worship and Education bowed profoundly.

"Sir!" said the lady. The strictly measured inclination of her head, the reproving rustle of the silk skirt, might have petrified a less stout heart.

"My dear Charles-Edward," she then breathed gustily into her nephew's attentive ear, "I do not blame you for fidelity in friendship, but I cannot but

continue to regard these minions of the Republic as sadly out of place in the house of a Fitzroy."

She closed her eyes upon the abhorrent spectacle, and, relapsing into weakness, again requested the charity of a chair.

The sailor thrust forward a seat; the Duke gently directed the weight of the Marquise into the same; Favereau provided a footstool; and the Marquis stuck two lean fingers between his mother's elbow and the arm of the chair to prevent the shock of contact.

"Another day of such emotions will kill me. Oh, Charles-Edward," went on Madame de Lormes with rising pathos, "you do not know what it means to be a mother!"

"True indeed, my dear Aunt," admitted Cluny, respectfully.

"Seeing me again after so long has been too much for her," said the sailor to Nessie.

"Never mind *la Maman*," whispered the Marquis, good-humouredly digging a sharp reassuring elbow into his step-brother's ribs. "You're rather big, you see, to come on one all of a sudden, but she'll resign herself; *Maman* is very pious. She knows how to resign herself."

He edged round to Nessie as he spoke. "Terribly pious, *la Maman*," he reasseverated, "eh, Ma'ame Rodriguez?" Then, lowering his voice still more, with a killing ogle, happily secure behind his mother's back, "Famous chance to find you here!" he chuckled.

"Anatole!" cried the Marquise, with sharp intuition.

"Yes, my Mother."

"Stand behind my chair."

The French son trotted obediently to heel. The American son opened large, amazed blue eyes, and misgiving crept into his independent soul.

Nessie noted the expression of his face, and mischievously whispered in his ear:

"My! yes, you 'll find them a queer lot over here! But there — these French they may be shaky on the Seventh Commandment now and again, but you bet they 're solid on the Fifth!"

Meanwhile, Madame de Lormes had started upon a new grievance with fresh gusto.

"Explain to me," she demanded of the Duke, "how you came to allow Helen to start this foolish business about the orphan? When she asked me to chaperon the young person from Paris — of course I could refuse nothing to your house — I must confess that I was surprised at the communication, more especially as, considering the circumstances in which I find myself at present, it seemed strange that Helen should have thought of adding to my burdens."

"I am sure," said Cluny, duly apologetic, "Helen had no idea that you were in any trouble. Indeed, I hear of it for the first time myself. I am concerned."

Madame de Lormes raised her prominent eyes to stare with unaffected astonishment at her nephew.

"Surely," she exclaimed, hoisting herself from her reclining position, "she was aware of George's un-

expected arrival. Helen, as a woman, might have understood. But," collapsing again, morally and physically, into resignation, "it is only a mother that can understand the feelings of a mother."

Seeing that Madame de Lormes seemed to look upon the arrival of her trans-oceanic son as an unmixed calamity, the mere male might well have been excused for failing to comprehend the mysteries of the maternal heart. Cluny, straightening himself, exchanged a glance of amusement with Favereau.

"It is not possible," the contralto resumed with its deepest note of protest, "that my niece can be in earnest in her insane project of adopting that objectionable school-girl."

"Hush!" here cried George Dodd with some peremptoriness; for, through the open doorway, his quick eye had caught in the gloom of the hall a gleam of white approaching skirts.

"Ah, Helen at last!" cried Cluny, joyously, the oppression which the talk with Favereau had left upon his mind being lifted at the approach of his wife.

. . . . . .

All eyes were now turned upon the new-comers. No one noticed, as the pair advanced into distinctness out of shades of dusk, intangible still yet all-enveloping, that the Duke, with suddenly livid countenance and limbs struck into rigidity, stood staring at the slight girlish figure that demurely moved by his wife's side. So might a man in delirium stare upon some horrible creation of his own brain.

Helen's sweet face beamed as she looked down at the small bare head at her shoulder: a head modestly bent, on which a wealth of pale flaxen curls was tied back with a black riband. It seemed as if the girl faltered shyly now and again, and Helen's voice of encouragement reached the silent, expectant group. Favereau, peering through his glasses, with anticipatory disapproval at the school-girl, was startled out of his placid mood of criticism by a frenzied clutch on his wrist and a whispering voice in his ear. The clutch was that of a man's hand, ice-cold and wet; the voice was hoarse and unrecognisable.

"Stand before me, stand before me!" it urged. "Don't let Helen see me. I—I feel as if I were going mad!"

Favereau turned round, and started as he saw Cluny's face.

"Edward!" he ejaculated under his breath.

"Hush!" cried the other in his awful whisper. "Not a word, for God's sake! Stand before me, I say . . . there, like that . . . screen me as I go down the steps!"

Without further question Favereau allowed himself to be dragged a few paces back towards the edge of the terrace, shielding Cluny's escape into the garden. Helen had now come close. Still keeping a motherly hand upon her companion's shoulder, she looked round.

"But where is Cluny?" she asked, surprised. "I want to introduce this child to him."

There was a general movement of inquiry.

"Why, he was here a second ago," said Nessie.

"*Farceur de Cluny*," squeaked the little Marquis. "Hates school-girls as much as I do." (This under his breath.)

"I am afraid," said Favereau, hiding an uneasy bewilderment under an assumption of his usual geniality, "that Edward's affection for his cigarette, and" — with an inclination towards the Dowager — "Madame's well-known dislike to smoke, are responsible for this defection."

Helen looked puzzled and disappointed. But in a second she brightened again.

"Ah, well," she said gaily, "we must wait. Meanwhile, you are a sort of grandpapa, my old friend;" — she pushed the girl forward as she spoke — "this is Gioja," she cried triumphantly, "my Gioja!" Madame de Lormes groaned. "Gioja, this is Grandpapa Favereau."

The girl made a slight curtsey. Favereau bowed, and peered benevolently enough at the pretty face that looked wonderfully small and pale in the twilight.

"Helen might have done worse," was his first thought, "quite lady-like, quite nice, quite inoffensive. Well, it is not so bad."

His kind face was wrinkled into a smile. He bent again to speak. As he did so the girl looked up suddenly. Her eyes met his, full and close. Favereau raised himself with a jerk.

"*The devil!*"

A cold sweat broke out upon him; he thought he must have called the words aloud, have shrieked

them. He felt as if the solid earth had given way beneath his feet, as if with a crash the world had become disintegrated and all was chaos and falling ruin.

He reeled and came to himself. The world was where it stood. The old château reared itself against the sky; there was an indifferent murmur of voices around him, and Helen was laughing. Laughing!

BOOK II.—THE EVENING OF THE DAY

"And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron."— DEUTERONOMY.

CHAPTER X

SEVEN o'clock in the Château de Luciennes.—Velvet-carpeted silence in the library; without, all about, the machinery of the great house working noiselessly to the acme of comfort; the massive Louis XIV. clock ticking the flight of time to stately measure; a log or two flickering on the hearth (one of the Duke's fancies, who disliked an empty fireplace); the sound of the rain, fast falling on the terrace stones, all but shut out by casements and curtains; the cheerful licking of the flames adding what might seem the last note of home perfection to the scene.

On nearly the whole of three sides of the room were spread the books, forming what the Marquis de Lormes called the most *fichue* library in France, for there was hardly a book in it younger in date than the second Restoration. The late Duke had taken a good deal of pride in making complete its unique character; and Cluny himself, though neither a student nor an antiquarian like his father, was connoisseur enough to appreciate to the full the charm of the elegant, the stately, the quaint, or the naïvely outspoken old-world company assembled in his favourite room. He would have considered it as

much a sin against art and taste to have introduced among them a George Sand, a Maupassant, or a Prévost, as to have hung even the best canvas from the last salon beside his Hobbemas, his Lorraines, and his Vandycks.

Surrounded by this peace, this harmony of a beautiful past and an appreciative present, the master of the house, who loved his home, who had not untruly said of himself that he was bound by his very heart-strings to its presiding genius, his wife; who had returned with such infinite content but an hour ago to his paradise, sat now alone, wrapt in terror, afraid to face the hell in his soul.

The light from a silver reading lamp just caught within its radius the bent head; and threw every bone of the clasped hands, locked in a convulsive misery, into white relief.

. . . . . .

Favereau, already in evening dress, noiselessly opened the door and stood on the threshold, looking in. He found it hard to recognise his friend in the huddled figure by the fire. After a moment's contemplation, he closed the door and advanced.

Cluny raised his head, recognised him with a faint relaxation upon his haggard face; then, extending his hand, but without rising, said tonelessly—

"You got my message? Thank you for coming."

Even as a little while ago on the terrace, Favereau took no notice of the gesture; the Duke let his hand fall upon his knee again with a sigh of misery far beyond the touch of minor grievance.

Once or twice he endeavoured to speak, but fruitlessly. After a long pause, looking away dully into the happy leaping flames:

"I don't know how to tell you," he muttered.

The other folded his arms on the back of the tall chair and stood another second or two in silence, still surveying the Duke with his most expressionless gaze.

"You need not," he answered at last, in his most expressionless voice. "I know."

The unhappy man sprang to his feet with a cry of horror.

"What! Is it known already? My God!"

"Hush," said Favereau, commandingly; "control yourself." And with a change of voice he pursued arily, "You have quite a power of description. I recognised . . . the devil's eyes."

The Duke drew a breath of momentary relief. "Is that all? Thank Heaven!"

"Is not that enough?"

Again followed silence. Cluny began to pace the room. Twice he wiped impatiently the beading perspiration from his forehead. Finally, he burst forth with that vain railing against trouble which none but the most philosophic seem able to forbear.

"It is like a nightmare. Could any one have imagined so impossible, so diabolical a coincidence? There were a million, ten hundred million chances against it!"

Favereau's low voice answered, coldly inexorable, like the utterance of an oracle:

"But there was *one* for it. When a man puts his happiness to the chance, he stakes to lose, sooner or later."

The Duke stared at him. It is doubtful whether, in the agonising strain of grappling with an insoluble problem, these words of useless wisdom conveyed any meaning.

"What is to be done? What is to be done?' he repeated feverishly. "I feel as if my head were going."

"Keep it on your shoulders," said Favereau, this time not unkindly. "You will want it just now."

The Duke flung himself back into his chair and made a painful effort at self-command.

"Advise me," he said. "I will do anything you tell me. . . . Shall I invent an excuse and leave the house now, before I meet her?"

Favereau came round to his friend's chair, sat down and turned towards him eyes in which severity had almost merged into pity — eyes wise and sad, not unlike those of a physician by the bedside of a hopeless case.

"What would be the use of that?" he asked gently. "A mere putting off of the evil moment, with added complications."

"Shall I see her secretly, then? Give her money, send her away, secure her departure, her silence, at any price?"

"Edward," cried Favereau, and threw hands and eyes upwards, "you may well say your head is going. What, man, give Helen's happiness into such keeping?"

The Duke seemed to collapse, physically and mentally.

"Then tell me for pity's sake," he exclaimed in an almost extinguished voice, "what is to be done."

It has been said that the test of courage is responsibility. M. Favereau was one of those men who are bound to succeed as leaders in whatever walk of life they may choose, partly owing to this very quality of being willing and able to bear responsibility, partly because of his extraordinary promptitude in weighing chances and making up his mind to a definite course of action in an emergency. He did not now hesitate in his advice upon a complication so hideous to a chivalrous mind that the wisest might well have faltered.

"There are two courses open to you," he answered in his clear, didactic voice. "One is God's way. The other the devil's way. The first is to make a clean breast of it to Helen, and then to try and start afresh, and build a new life together out of the ruins of the old."

Cluny had started to his feet. "It would kill her!" he cried, and the look he cast upon his counsellor was unconsciously one of fierce reproach.

Favereau's lips were twisted under his moustache with a smile of indescribable bitterness.

By so much as his power of love was greater than that of the wretched man before him; by the breadth of the gulf that divided his stainless constancy to a woman he had given up from the easy sophistry of her husband's infidelity; by the difference between a

light nature and an earnest one; by all such measure seemed his own agony for Helen incomparably greater than that of his friend.

Since the fatal situation had become revealed to him his soul had never ceased to lament within him with the cry of helpless tenderness: "*Helen! What will become of Helen? Why did I give her up? She would have loved me. I would have understood her. I was worthy of her.*" To the passion of the secret lover was added the pathetic yearning of a father's protective tenderness towards the little girl whose innocent lips had kissed him so often, whose arms had clung round his neck, who in her ripe womanhood still turned to him for help with the old child-like confidence. He folded his arms, clutching his hands upon them with iron tension.

"Kill her?" he echoed, after a moment's pause. "Very likely. But there are other things to consider than mere life. That is the right course."

"I cannot, I cannot!" cried Cluny, piteously. For a second he had tried to face the prospect, and even in thought had quailed hopelessly before it. "She trusts me, Favereau: think of her trusting eyes! She believes in me, how could I tell her? She could not understand. Oh, she's not one of those women who *could* understand! She never knew evil in her life. Favereau, I cannot."

Favereau's lean face remained impassive, but there was a slight relaxation of the tense muscles.

"I never thought you could," he answered, with cold contempt. In his heart he had dreaded with a

veritable terror lest his own Spartan advice should be accepted; lest his beloved should be struck with such a death blow. He breathed a quick sigh of relief. "Well," — he changed his attitude, uncrossed his legs, and laid his hands upon his knees — "there's the other way — the devil's way."

"It is the devil's work," cried Cluny, savagely; "'t is fit he should show the way."

"So be it!" said the other. "Sit down, Edward, and listen quietly. There is nothing for you, then, but to brazen the matter out. If Helen does not know to-night, from your own lips, she must never know. Everything — everything, mind you — must be sacrificed to that end."

The Duke, who had been eagerly listening, hoping against hope for some solution, relapsed into full despair.

"But, my God!" said he, "the girl? She cannot but recognise me."

"She shall not recognise you," said Favereau, looking at him with icy determination.

"But, ah! do not mock me; for heaven's sake, explain."

"You were not wont to be so dull of wit," said Favereau, impatiently. "This creature, this girl, this child, has met a certain Monsieur Le Chevalier. She has never laid eyes on the Duke of Cluny. Do you understand now?"

Cluny gave a sharp cry of joyful apprehension, followed, however, by what was almost a shudder of repugnance.

"What an infamous part to play!" he murmured, and covered his face with his hands.

Favereau, with the first show of anger he had allowed to escape him during the interview, struck him on the shoulder.

"Come, Edward," he exclaimed, "this will not do. You dare not play the weakling now, after playing the — well, the fool. God, man, you must act! You must deceive, you must lie. Ah, you had not so many scruples of conscience about lying when it was merely a question of your pleasure, Monsieur Le Chevalier! Lie now, Duke of Cluny, for your wife's sake. Lie your hardest. Lie like a man!"

Cluny groaned aloud.

"Oh," pursued Favereau, stamping his foot, "you have the curse of your race upon you. Foolhardy to madness in the courting of useless danger, weaker than water when the time has come for decision. Forget — forget you are a Stuart. Be a scoundrel, since now you must, but be a man!"

The other raised his face, and looked up in an agony. "I would rather die, and have done with it."

"Of course you would," cried Favereau, with passionate scorn. "I expected no less than that. A ball through the head: infallible remedy for the coward, for the base. But you must live, Edward, live and take your punishment — for Helen's sake."

Cluny rose stiffly. "You have said enough," he replied, livid, but suddenly composed. "I am quite ready. — But what if the girl begins by making a scene before Helen? Have you thought of that?"

"Have I thought of that!" The Minister nearly laughed. "You must meet her first alone, of course. Leave it to me, I will contrive it."

"And then," said Cluny, "the danger will be but beginning. Oh, you do not know what a being you have to deal with!"

"I do not know her," said Favereau, relentlessly; "but she shall be made to see that here she must hold her tongue upon her past. And then we must get her out of the house at the first opportunity. Soon. To-morrow, if possible. Oh, that ought to be easy enough: your wish is law here. And Helen — God bless her! — is not hard to deceive. At any rate you know how to do it."

Again Cluny let the sneer pass, with the callousness of his overwhelming despair.

"You can feign jealousy," pursued Favereau, "boredom, antipathy."

"Antipathy!" echoed the Duke, with what was almost a sob. "I had rather be in hell than under the same roof with her and Helen."

CHAPTER XI

FAVEREAU went to the heavy door that gave upon the hall and set it ajar. With a faint astonishment in his weary eyes the Duke looked after him.

"Helen is coming," said the older man simply. And, indeed, as he spoke, the note of Helen's voice was heard outside.

But an hour ago on the terrace this sensation of his wife's approach had brought the husband a sense of inexpressible comfort. Now his heart almost stopped with the apprehension of it.

The room was too dully lit for Favereau to see his friend's face, but he seemed to divine the terror which hesitated on the point of flight.

"Tranquillise yourself," he said, closing the door for a second to speak into the room. "Helen is alone; 't is early yet."

He now threw the door open. Helen was standing in the hall talking to Blanchette. Brilliant light glinted on her soft brown hair, on the fair neck, on the priceless pearls, which Cluny vowed were the only jewels worthy to lie on that satin skin. Blanchette's deep-toned visage shone with a glow which seemed

to emanate as much from the content within as from the illumination without.

Helen interrupted her conversation for a moment to smile at the two men, then she proceeded, enforcing her words with gentle gesture of her finger.

"And then, Blanchette, when you have made her take the cup of broth, you must hurry back — back to Mademoiselle, I mean — and finish dressing her, just as you used to dress me, you know, when I was a girl. And then, Blanchette, you must bring her down yourself, for she is shy, poor little thing. Bring her to me here, in the library."

She patted the mulatto's arm; then swept into the room, passed Favereau swiftly, with just a smiling glance as he closed the door behind her, went straight to the motionless figure of her husband and laid both her hands upon his shoulders.

"Ah, truant," said she, "how I have missed you!" All the harmony of her love and happiness filled her voice with music.

Cluny, with an effort, opened his lips to answer, but she placed her finger upon them.

"Hush," she cried; "no excuses, sir." Then, laying her head against his neck, she went on, with a deeper note of tenderness, "Cluny, my beloved, I wanted to thank you."

Favereau made an unobtrusive movement as if intent on a discreet exit, but she arrested him.

"Stay, Favereau," said she, merely turning her head to look at him, "stay and hear what a happy woman you made of me."

Favereau stood, as ordered, with his hand still on the door handle. Even with his absolute self-control he could not conjure up a smile, much less a gay word in answer; and he was thankful for the shadows that made this unresponsiveness pass unnoticed. With his free hand he made a sign at which Helen laughed, interpreting good-humoured remonstrance. "Oh, you lovers!" she read in his gesture. Cluny, to whom it was addressed, read more truly, "I am at my post. Have courage." And he drew a deep breath.

"Cluny," Helen went on, "you never will allow me to thank you for all your goodness to me. But I must, I must to-day, for my heart is overflowing. Since that child has crossed our threshold I feel as if the one thing wanting to my happiness had come to complete it. Oh, my dear husband, you have never once let me guess how you must feel the emptiness of our home, lest I should take it as a reproach to myself — I who have given you no children! And now, because my heart yearned to this motherless girl, you bid me take her to it, and never think of grudging me the only joy of motherhood I can hope to taste. God will reward you. God will reward you, not only for the good deed to the poor orphan, but for your goodness to your happy wife!"

There was a pause. Her head sank lower on his breast. Neither man spoke or moved.

"Oh, how hard your heart is beating, Cluny!"

The Duchess raised herself to peer into his face.

He was well outside the circle of the lamplight, and it was evident she could see nothing unusual in his expression.

"Well," she went on, full of the gentle egoism of her new charity, "I have told Gioja that this is now her home till she finds a better one; that she is never to feel desolate again, never to know what it is to miss a mother's care." She emphasised each "never" by a soft beat of her hands against her husband's breast. It was to him as if those tender hands were irrevocably riveting the chains of his undoing. "I have told her that I am her godmother. I cannot think I have done wrong in this, for I feel that she is indeed sent by God to be my child. Ah, it was touching! I wish you could both have seen her face when I brought her into her pretty pink room, and showed her all the things I had prepared for her." She disengaged herself from her husband's encircling arms and stood smiling at her own recollections, gazing at the blazing logs. The firelight played on her face, a sight more heartrending in its placidity just then to the two who watched her than if it had been convulsed with tears. "I have been inspired, I think, for Blanchette vows that, with the help of a few stitches, Gioja will be able to wear to-night one of the gowns I have had made for her. It is just suited to her — fresh, girlish, spotless. Favereau, don't you think she has a dear pretty face?"

Cluny suddenly caught his wife to his breast. Had it been her dead body that he was clasping to him instead of this happy, loving, living, responsive

frame, there could not have been a purer agony in his passion.

"Cluny!" she cried, rebukingly, "Cluny!" But it was impossible to keep from her voice a note of exultant pride. Blushing and smiling, she disengaged herself, and flung a shy glance over her shoulder towards Favereau. "You must forgive a foolish couple," she said.

Favereau swallowed a lump in his throat. In his effort to speak naturally his voice was perhaps a trifle harder than usual.

"I don't want to throw cold water on your enthusiasm, my dear," said he, "but I do think a couple that adopts a grown-up infant very foolish indeed. I hope that the young lady with the curious name may turn out as desirable an inmate of your house as you fondly hope. But if Cluny should find her rather in the way, after all, in spite of his good nature ——"

He paused upon the doubt. Helen's face fell, as openly as a child's.

"Oh, Favereau!"

"Don't be afraid, Helen," said Cluny, hoarsely. "I shall never do anything — wilfully — to bring that shadow into your eyes."

Favereau suddenly bent his ear, then he opened the door. Blanchette's voice, in its high sing-song, floated in:

"Mind the steps, Mamzell, dey uncommon slippy!"

Cluny started, and flung a desperate look at his friend. The latter, however, apparently quite im-

perturbable, stepped out of the library into the hall and closed the door behind him.

"Ah, there comes the little one!" cried Helen, and moved swiftly across the room to receive the new object of her delight.

She found the handle held without; and as in amazement she exclaimed and turned again to her husband, Favereau quietly re-entered, closed the door behind him and put his back against it.

"What is it?" said Helen.

"Oh, nothing," said Favereau, smiling quite airily. "I won't have you disturbed just before dinner, that's all."

Cluny turned sharply away from his petrified attitude of watching, and, leaning his elbow on the mantle-shelf, supported his averted head upon his hand.

"But what is it?" repeated Helen.

"Only, my dear St. Elizabeth, some silly servants' talk about the young woman whom you took into your house to-day being — well, rather bad."

"Bad!" echoed Helen, in her eager way. She stretched her hand to push his aside from the door handle.

"Nonsense," said Favereau, holding on with determined grip. "I will not have you go to her now. She is well looked after; I know you have seen to that. What further good could you do?"

"What good?" cried the Duchess, indignantly. "Help her to live, or help her to die!"

Again she laid her hand upon his, found herself

impotent against his strength. With a flash of her eyes she turned swiftly and left the room by the opposite door, all thought for the moment obliterated but the single one that her charity was needed.

Favereau released the door handle, drew a deep breath and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

CHAPTER XII

"DERE, Mamzell!" said Blanchette and patted the girl's sash.

Upon the threshold she had delayed the triumphant entry to retie the silken folds. And very proud she was of the effect of all this dainty lace and muslin.

Blanchette, with the inherited subserviency of generations, would no more have dreamed of forming an individual opinion where a decision of her beloved mistress was in question than she would have thought of interfering with a law of nature. She had therefore adopted the new-comer with a heartiness all the more enthusiastic perhaps that her fellow servants ("dat rubbish!") unanimously condemned the innovation.

With the familiarity of the old retainer she now placed her broad dark hand in the centre of the girl's slender waist, and propelled her into the room; then looked round, one triumphant grin, for her mistress. The subsequent expression of disappointment upon her dusky visage was almost burlesque.

"Missie said I should find her here, Massa Favereau."

"Unfortunately," answered Favereau — the man had seemingly nerves of iron, and to Cluny, who

would have waited for the hour of his execution with a lighter heart, the sound of the kind, bantering, every-day tone was almost divine in its encouragement — "unfortunately, my good Blanchette, I was imprudent enough to repeat to the Duchess just now some littlè phrase I heard you let fall as you came down about the woman, — Rose, I think you called her. And the Duchess has flown to her."

The negress clucked her tongue noisily. "If dat ain't Missie all over! And Mamzell such a pictur'!"

"Well," said Favereau, "the Duke is here, you know. He and I meanwhile can admire the picture, can't we? Go and help your mistress." He clapped her on her fat shoulder as, grinning again, she dropped her dip.

"Come in, Mademoiselle," said he; and once more resuming his functions at the door, he closed it upon the outer world. "Dear me, how dark it is! I do not think you have yet been introduced to the Duke."

He walked over to the writing-table and quietly lifted the green shade from the lamp.

The little figure near the door paused, hesitating. Slender arms falling loosely, bare to the elbow; small hands just clasped by the finger-tips; small head bent on a young slight neck; curls, of the texture and colour as a rule only seen on very young children, glimmering in the light — for the rest, all snowy, diaphanous white, falling around the shapely slender outline.

As Favereau turned to look at her the whole affair

seemed to him a monstrous nightmare. For a second the impulse to call to his friend: "Wake up, man, and look; we have been dreaming!" was so strong upon him that it drove him to a silence of hesitation — silence during which the ancient clock ticked out a quarter of a minute of suspense such as it surely had never measured for human being before during the long years of its mechanical existence.

It has already been said, however, that Favereau was not of those that hesitate.

"Cluny!" he called.

The Duke heard the warning in his voice. Good blood — and, after all, his was good blood — cannot fail, says the French proverb. The royal blood within him mustered now in Cluny's veins with a new desperate courage to help him — for Helen's sake — "to lie like a man!" He was ducal, urbane, courteous, dignified, absolutely master of the situation, as he advanced to take his guest's hand and bid her welcome to his house.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I am charmed to make your acquaintance."

At his first accent the sombre eyes flashed wide in her small face. For a second she stared as if unable to credit the evidence of her senses. The next moment an extraordinary colour, an extraordinary light overspread her countenance. It was as if flower of snow had suddenly turned to flower of summer flame. She bounded forward, and seized the outstretched hand in both of hers, with ringing cry:

"Monsieur Le Chevalier! . . . "

Favereau, watching (to recur to the old simile) much as the physician by the bedside watches the approach of the crisis, now perceived with gathering dismay a new and possibly fatal complication:

She loved him! This creature, the wanton child, the living problem that had startled the seasoned man of the world with vistas of unknown depravity — she loved him!

A fresh sweat of horror broke upon the Minister's forehead. With mere perversity he had felt ready, brutally ready, to deal. But all his manhood recoiled at the thought of throwing the first stone at the little sinner who had sinned through love. He withdrew into the shadow.

The Duke, on the other hand, seemed to have become hardened by sheer stress of circumstances, both morally and physically, to a white, marble callousness. His acting was almost too perfect. More surprise, not to say some show of discomposure, might better have met the extraordinary situation. The coolness, however, with which he disengaged his hand, the mocking bow, and the faint elevation of eyebrows which accentuated his reply, were convincing enough for the moment.

"The Duke of Cluny, at your service," said he, urbanely correcting an absurd error.

She fell back a step; her colour faded. A sort of mask seemed to fall upon the eager face; the light in the eyes went out.

"The Duke of Cluny!" she repeated, in a bewildered tone; and on the instant she was again the

artless maiden. A short silence ensued; the something abnormal in the very air, the tension between the two men so painfully obvious to themselves, could not but become perceptible to her. Once more the scorching flame of her gaze leaped up to the Duke's face; and then, with a scream: "No!" she cried, "Monsieur Le Chevalier!"

"You seem to be misled by some curious resemblance," said the Duke, in his ice-cold voice; "but pray allow me to assure you that I am the Duke of Cluny."

The girl stood as if arrested on a spring, her hands clenched together, her gaze searing his face and figure. Again there seemed to come for a second a doubt within her, a transient conflict; but only for a second. Her countenance grew distorted.

"You may be the Duke of Cluny," she said, in a hoarse whisper, "but you are——" She broke off, and the look, the very pause, were a more terrible indictment than speech.

Cluny was smiling. "There is evidently some mystery here," said he. "You are agitated, Mademoiselle." His composure was ghastly. "Come, sit down, and tell me all about it. 'T is a case of mistaken identity, evidently. Most curious! I have heard of such complete resemblances: they lead sometimes to droll misunderstandings, it is said. So I am very like a friend of yours?"

He pushed a chair towards her, and, leaning over the back of it, looked at her, still smiling. She remained standing, rigid.

"Very like," she answered slowly, in her strangled whisper.

"Ah!" commented he — there was nothing but his pallor to betray that he was fighting a duel to the death — "some old friend of yours, I suppose? Some dear friend?"

"Dear!" she echoed. Her young voice broke. "Yes, my God!"

The pause came again. She stood clenching and unclenching her hands, her frame torn with a passion such as happily the majority of women never know. A kind of sob broke from her, and the Duke felt that if he were to emerge victorious he must allow himself no more such breathing spaces or his courage to strike would fail him.

"Will you not sit down?" he urged benevolently. "Will you not tell me what is the matter? Is it, perhaps, some little affair of the heart?"

She gave a stifled scream; it would have been hard to say whether of anguish or rage. With chin craned forward, lips parted, blazing eyes, the veritable image of a young fury, a torrent of abuse was rising in her throat. But the steady inflexible look of the Duke, the heavy silence, the very luxury of the room, seemed to overawe her suddenly. She swayed, fell into the chair offered to her and rocked herself to and fro, holding her hands to her lips with a schoolgirl gesture of self-repression. All at once she looked up at the tall figure beside her.

"Oh, you — you!" she began below her breath; then stopped.

The Duke laid his finger gently on her shoulder. "Do not forget," said he, "that you are speaking to the Duke of Cluny."

With a swift, feline movement she caught his hand as he was about to withdraw it. For a second she held it, looked at it; then, kissing it fiercely on the palm, flung it from her with a laugh that was struggling with sobs.

"And do you dare say," she cried, rising, "that I have not kissed that hand before?"

Her hysterical laughter fell hideously upon the men's ears. Slipping her little fingers under the folds of muslin at her neck, she pulled forward a string of magnificent pearls. A moment's hesitation now, the Duke felt, would be fatal.

"Mademoiselle," said he, for the first time dropping his cloak of light courtesy and allowing a tone of grave warning to sound in voice and words, "Mademoiselle, had you not better control yourself . . . and try to realise the situation?"

He spoke the last words with slow, emphatic meaning.

A hush fell on the girl. She listened and was silent, as if revolving the hidden purport of the phrase.

It seemed to Favereau from his corner that upon her face, by turns mask-like and quivering with expression, he could now read every phase of her undisciplined, passionate soul. Before even she spoke again, by the tide of colour on her cheek, by the light of those eyes which Cluny had called devil-

haunted, by the quiver of the lips, by the whole yielding of her being to an impulse of overpowering delight, he knew what hideous significance she had thought to find in his friend's caution.

"Stay!" she cried, "stay!" She put out her hand, and it trembled, while her voice quivered with a lark-like note of joy. "Don't speak — let me think! This sudden change in my life, this adoption falling upon me from the skies without explanation — oh, I see it all! I see now! How blind, how stupid I have been! Ah, you did love me — you do love me, after all! What does the rest, what does anything else matter!"

She ran to him and seized his inertly pendent hand with both hers.

In the horror of the comprehension of her thought, in the horror of the touch that conveyed such a meaning, the Duke recoiled almost with violence. His self-possession failed him at last. He groaned:

"Great God!"

Favereau saw that the time had come for his interference. He advanced.

"Forgive my interrupting," said he, placing himself between the two. His calm authoritative voice fell like a stream of cool water upon the bubbling heat of their passion. Cluny flung him a quick look of grateful relief. The girl started with a sinuous angry movement, and turned upon the intruder like a little viper disturbed. She had forgotten his presence in her all-absorbing emotion. Meeting his eye, however, she recoiled with something like fear.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "will you not sit down again?" The courteous invitation was a command. She sat down, and this Minister of France, who for the first time in his life had set his hand to do ignoble work, felt that he might yet be master of the evil situation. "Edward," he went on, turning quietly to his friend, "perhaps you will allow me to undertake the task of making this young lady understand under what a fantastic delusion she is labouring."

Cluny withdrew to his old post, the chimney-piece.

Favereau took a chair beside the girl. At any moment, he knew, Helen might break in upon them. As at the critical point of a battle, he felt that the decisive blow must be struck without sparing, yet with all deliberation. Indicating the Duke by a slight gesture:

"Look well, Mademoiselle," said he, gravely yet not unkindly — "look well. Think, and recognise your mistake. There is the Duke of Cluny, a gentleman whom not only you have never met before, but one whom you could never have met before — you quite understand me, don't you? — whom you could not, by any possibility, have met before. That he recalls to you some person of your acquaintance can have nothing to do with him. Now, the Duchess of Cluny, I am told, has chosen you as the particular object of her benevolence. She has received you into her house, she has promised to provide for you. The Duchess believes you, of course, to be an innocent, a well-brought-up girl, deserving this extraordinary favour."

Gioja's great eyes, dark with dilating pupils, fixed upon the speaker's face, became filled with a dawning terror. The man proceeded incisively, waxing strong on his advantage:

"The Duke of Cluny has made it his pride never to thwart his wife in her vocation of charity. He therefore consented to your introduction into the privacy of his house with characteristic generosity. But," said Favereau, with a deliberation which perhaps the cold indulgence of his tone rendered all the more cruel, "the Duchess of Cluny's peace of mind is the first object of the Duke's life. He makes it his duty to protect her at any cost from trouble or disappointment. No person would be allowed to remain under his roof a single day who showed herself likely to bring sorrow or annoyance to his wife."

The girl gasped. "What do you mean me to understand?" she asked, with dry lips, her gaze still riveted, as if fascinated, upon the bearded impassive face.

"That the young lady," answered Favereau, "whom the Duchess honours with her protection must show herself, both as regards the past and the present, worthy of that honour." He paused to allow the words to sink in. Then he suddenly became genial, almost paternal. "It is evident," he went on, "that your mind, my child, as is not unusual with young people of your age, is filled with much romantic rubbish; and that, excited no doubt by the strange circumstances attending your unexpected good fortune, you have been tempted, on

entering this new life, to create sensation by turning the accident of a chance resemblance into a page of some favourite novel. Forget all this pernicious stuff." He dropped his playful tone for one of renewed gravity. "Remember only that your future is in your own hands — to make or to mar."

She rose stiffly to her feet, and stretched out her arms towards the Duke with the single word:

"Speak!"

It was a helpless, frightened, childish appeal.

"Mademoiselle," said Cluny, hoarsely, "Monsieur Favereau has spoken for me."

A little while she stood, looking swiftly from one to the other; in her eyes was the impotent rage, the agonising terror of a trapped animal. Then she wrung her hands, and once again the unnatural look, the woman's look, of bitterness and suffering and passion convulsed her face.

"You are brave, gentlemen . . ." she said at last, almost inaudibly. "Two men against a girl!"

"Faugh!" said Favereau, in a savage whisper, to Cluny, as he brushed by him to replace the shade upon the lamp, "with what pitch are we here defiled!"

Had they won? They could not know. Those little clenched hands still held the fate of all that made life beautiful to both of them.

But if they had won, in truth the victory was bitter.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE came a prolonged silence over the three: a heavy silence, in awful contrast with the inner clamour of their thoughts, and accentuated by the minor sounds within the room.

A small flame voice sang sweetly and cheerily among the logs on the hearth. The solemn clock ticked on, every stroke of the pendulum falling upon the Duke's heart like the stroke of a hammer upon the coffin of his manly honour. The quavering chime struck the half-hour, a distant bell clanged. The dressing bell! Helen would soon be with them again; the routine of life go on as usual. His very soul turned sick.

Neither of the men looked at each other. There are moments when each knows too well the other's thoughts to dare to let eyes commune. The girl stood with bent head, a sullen lip out-thrust, plucking at the folds of her sash.

Thus Helen found them.

A moment she stood, looking in upon them; and Favereau alone had presence of mind enough to advance and smile. Her eyes swiftly sought the little white figure.

"What! — Joy!" she cried: thus, after the eternal mother-fashion had Helen already shortened her new daughter's name. Then she broke into a merry laugh. "What a baby! Look at the poor child, not daring to open her lips between these two great men!" She came forward, draperies flowing, motherly arms outstretched. Gathering the girl to her she looked, gently mocking, from her husband to Favereau.

"I believe — really one would say — she has frightened them as much as they have frightened her. Have you spoken to my husband, little Joy?"

"Yes, Madame."

Words barely breathed, long black lashes sweeping the wan cheeks.

"It was very terrible, was it not?" said the Duchess, with the tenderest banter.

"Yes, Madame."

Helen kissed her. "There, she ought not to have been deserted. Why, she is trembling all over, poor child!" The Duchess turned upon Favereau in mock indignation: "It is all your fault, sir. You picked up the wrong end of the story, you old busybody. My patient is very weak, yet better, I think. But" — she interrupted herself with a gay change of voice, toying the while with the girl's fair curls — "but this is too sad a story for these ears. Time enough for them to learn the cruelty of the world. Now, Cluny, what do you think of my daughter?"

The man was forced to turn and look at them. The wife, standing close behind the girl, both hands upon her shoulders and overtopping the fair head

nearly by the height of her own, had placed her sweet, bright, confident face above the small white mask. His wife's eyes, the truest and the most loving, were looking at him beside the unholy flame of those other eyes — the devil's eyes!

His glance sought Helen's first; then met that of Gioja. And there it rested. The girl's deep, inscrutable, defiant gaze never wavered for a second. Cluny, with narrowing lids, with contracting pupils and eyes growing steel-grey like a sword blade, threw all the power of his being into the endeavour to gain the mastery, to force her lids to drop. In this voiceless struggle the colour rose to his cheeks. At last, with a bitter smile, he recognised that he was more than matched. But at least the very feeling of battle well engaged now braced his nerve.

"It is a little difficult," he said steadily, "to be called upon to pronounce so soon upon a stranger."

As he spoke he felt the sudden comfort of Favereau's presence at his side.

"It is to be hoped," said the Minister's gently sarcastic voice, "that the new daughter may never bring a cloud to the mother's face."

The girl shifted her glance quickly to him; but then it quailed and fell.

The entrance of the servants with lights and the sound of the oddly matched brothers' voices on the stair broke up the fitful colloquy and distracted Helen's mind from a sense of vague disappointment and intangible strain.

"My dear Cluny," she cried suddenly, running her eyes over his grey figure; "not dressed yet!"

Cluny, with his expressive French gesture, glanced down at his clothes, and moved towards the door. Here Favereau followed him and caught him by the shoulders.

"So far we are safe," whispered he, as he sped him with what seemed to the onlookers a good-natured push.

"I told you how it would be," said Cluny. "It is hell."

"No," answered the other, with the most melancholy cynicism; "only the road to it."

CHAPTER XIV

ANATOLE, Marquis de Lormes, Comte de Paimpol et de Sermonec, *chef du nom et des armes*, better known among his peers and intimates as "Totol" (and it must be admitted that the more familiar appellation suited him best) — the Marquis "Totol" — preceded his tall half-brother into the room, shooting his cuffs as he came.

His goggling eyes rolled, and as they caught sight of Gioja, his meagre countenance proclaimed disgust. The blue eyes of the sailor, on the other hand, kindled as they rested on the girl's fair head.

Helen was at that moment engaged in a motherly scrutiny of her new daughter's toilet.

They made a pretty picture with the flicker of the fire upon them — the gracious woman at the zenith of her beauty, and the girl —

> "Standing with reluctant feet
> Where the brook and river meet,
> Womanhood and childhood fleet."

So thought the sailor, who liked old-fashioned poetry and cherished those old-fashioned ideals which are still kept alive more faithfully, perhaps, in the New World than in the Old.

"Too bad of Helen," said the present representative of the Lormes, aside to Favereau, "to spring this school-girl upon us. For me," said the little man, and shook his hoary young head, "the young girl, the French young person, especially when fresh from the convent, is absolutely nauseating. *Ce que ça m'embête! Positivement ça me la coupe:* The English miss, *à la bonne heure!* And as for the American——" He rapturously kissed his hand in the air. "But, oh, the young demoiselle —la, la!"

"I can understand," said Favereau, with grim secret humour, "that you may have found that young lady preposterously unsophisticated. We were alone with her, the Duke and I, just now, and she made us pass a severe quarter of an hour."

The Marquis pulled his india-rubber face into a knowing grimace. The next moment it became illumined, though scarcely beautified, by an ecstatic smile. For, with a rattle of bangles, a jingle of chains, a tap and a shuffle of little slippers, and a tremendous general *frou-frou*, Madame Rodriguez made her appearance on the scene. He fixed his single glass in his eye with some difficulty and much gnawing motion of the jaw.

"There—ah, there's famous *chic*, real *chien*, if you like! The very last howling *pschutt*, in short," he exclaimed rapturously under his breath, appraising every item of toilet, figure, and impertinently pretty face. "*Crâne, au moins, celle-là*—eh?"

Meanwhile Helen had been conversing in a soft undertone to her new-found cousin from over seas.

"Yes," she said, after scrutinising his frank countenance with kindly pleasure, "I remember you. He once came to Paris, Joy, to visit us from America, that great country of his — and of mine, though I have never seen it; — you know, even on the map, how far away it looks! He was a little boy then, and I was quite a little girl. But he made a vast impression upon me. You called me a ''cute little thing,' George, and said that was a 'cunning' sort of dress we wore at the Blue Nuns. And though I wondered, I felt this was high praise. And he told me such wonderful stories of Indians and prairies and scalp-hunters and I know not what, and he presented me with what he called 'chew-gum.' Don't you remember, George?"

Her laugh rang out — the most heart-whole, most musical laugh in all the world.

"Why, certainly," said the American, in his deep voice, that gave one somehow the impression of a great reserve of strength and manliness, "I remember you very well. But the picture of the little girl with her hair in two pigtails don't fit in somehow with that of my lady Duchess in her beautiful home. I have seen a deal of your modern France these last few weeks in the World's Show yonder, and, if you 'll excuse me, it struck me as just a bit electro-plated. Therefore I feel it all the greater privilege to have an opportunity of making acquaintance with the real sterling thing. That 's what your home is: hall-marked, Helen, and no mistake."

His blue eyes wandered from the carved stone

chimney-piece, with its faded yet warmly tinted armorials, to the groups of tattered colours on the walls between the great book-cases — glorious rags that had seen such days and weathered such storms that barely a gleam of blue or red here and there betrayed which had been Highland fanion, which blue cross of French Stuart regiment.

What is there in the sight of old colours that moves the heart so strangely? Why are they more eloquent of pathos, of patriotism, of the stress and grandeur of conflict than even the dead hero's sword or the ruined stronghold? The republican's eyes kindled as they fell on these relics. From thence they travelled to the celebrated royal portrait, enthroned between the yellowing silk folds and broidered fleurs-de-lys of a French standard (this had evidently faced no crueller weapon than a lady's needle) and a tartan plaid so indescribably faded that it seemed to have borrowed the tints of the wild moorland and dying heather over which it had once brawly fluttered. There the face of the second James, in his beautiful princely boyhood, looked forth from under haughty drooping lids.

"By Jingo," said the sailor, "you bet that little fellow knew he was a Duke anyhow! Ancestor, Helen? But I need not ask. I don't set up for being art-wise, but your husband's very eyes seem fixed on one from that canvas. My, but it must be a great work!"

"That is our celebrated Vandyck," said Helen,

well pleased; "it is indeed an ancestor of Cluny's: James the Second, when he was Duke of York."

"The sort of fellow that makes one seem kind of small, somehow," said Lieutenant Dodd, with his good-humoured laugh. Then, with a start, he discovered the white figure of Gioja at his elbow. She too was gazing up at the picture with lips a little parted. His face softened as he looked down at her. "A lovely boy, is he not?" he said. And in addressing her his voice took an extraordinarily gentle note.

She flashed her dark eyes at him with a flutter of the eyelids which covered their secret fire and gave a sort of virginal timidity to the glance quite in keeping with her present attitude.

"Yes, sir," said she, in her pretty foreign English.

Favereau, with his back to the fire and his hands behind him, seemingly indifferent, closely watched the moving group.

"This American, now . . ." he was thinking. "A new complication. Stay — a solution, perchance, to the problem!"

The gladness of the thought struck him promptly with a sting of shame. With what fearful ease does poor humanity glide upon the downward slope! Pure honour had always been such an integral part of this man's soul that hitherto he had no more contemplated the possibility of losing it than of losing his identity. And now he was planning an honest fellow's undoing!

How could Edward have hoped to keep up his

systematic deviation into secret orchards, and thereafter resume unscathed his honoured way on the straight path of life, when his own one step from the high table-land of righteousness had already sent him — him, Favereau — spinning towards God knows what depths! Ah, that shame should dog a thought of his!

He looked sombrely at the sailor's face — a face in which the story of an elementally virile soul was written as upon an open book.

Mr. Dodd's creed was simple enough to read: love of his country, truth to himself, respect for women, and glory in his profession. He would live, and love, and work, and fight, and die without a questioning thought.

But Favereau was not of those who disguise to themselves the responsibility of their own deeds. Darkly he knew, as he watched, that come what might, he would coldly let the unsuspecting sailor drift to his doom; that he would not lift a finger to save him, could he thereby secure one chance of saving Helen from the awakening that menaced her.

Absorbed in these moods, he was startled by a fierce feminine whisper in his ear; by the clutch of a small hand upon his sleeve.

In the desire to share her immediate emotion with a mind more capable of intelligent response than that dwelling in the dwindled skull of the Marquis "Totol," Nessie had figuratively and literally seized upon her old friend.

"Well, and what is your impression, Minister, of

the new importation?" she murmured, vindictively jerking her head in the direction of Gioja. "Our fine sailor-hero seems to approve of it, anyhow. I don't believe he has eyes to see anything else." She shook out her rosy draperies with a deep sense of waste, of unappreciated merit. "As for Helen, she's floating in a kind of holy cloud of joy — Joy!" She sniffed derisively. "Is n't it a dear little innocent? Does n't she look as if butter would n't melt in her mouth, eh? Is n't it a sweet little babe-in-the-wood, that has never seen anything but robins and leaves, eh? My!" There was stiletto sharpness in each "eh," culminating in the shrillness of the last ejaculation. It was like finally turning the blade in the wound. "I do agree with Aunt Harriet — old cat! — for once in my life (though I would n't give her the satisfaction of telling her so for worlds), but I do agree that this is quite the worst of Helen's follies. Of course, you men are always taken with a pretty face; but I reckon you will side with me, Minister, that, for mere simpleness, the idea of getting the Duke to adopt an infant of that size and description, well — it 's beyond words! If that girl," she pursued, after a sufficiently eloquent pause, "does not make us all sit up before the week is out, my name ain't Nessie Rodriguez."

"Well, of course," answered Favereau, smoothly, with an inner dreary appreciation of his own irony, "you can only expect us men, as you say, to be in favour of the pretty face."

"Oh! I know," said the lady, with cheerful con-

tempt, "you are just as great a goose at heart as all the rest, or you would n't be a man, dear sir. My! I do wonder sometimes how the same Creator came to make us both. I expect when the Almighty took Adam's rib, He extracted the better half of his brains at the same time. There 's that Rodriguez, now. I 've just had a letter from him; he says he 's very sick. He 's got influenza. I know what that means. Now, a woman would be cute enough to have measles, or diphtheria, or cholera, or something, for a variety. There's never been a man that 's had influenza so frequent." She paused, to continue reflectively, "It 's a very expensive sickness, but he 's had it once too often this time."

Favereau laughed, but made no comment. Under the light of the reading lamp the Marquis de Lormes was engaged in pruning his favourite finger-nail with a gold-mounted penknife. His whole face was puckered into lines of deep earnestness. Helen's clear voice rose in the silence.

"That is the flag," she was saying, "which the great Maréchal de Cluny, the grandson of James the Second (the last Stuart King of England, Joy), took at Fontenoy. He was only a cornet then. But under the lead of his cousin, the gallant Berwick, he charged the Hanoverians at the head of the King's Household. You may not know, my little girl, that you are actually under the roof of the last male descendant of the royal race of Stuart."

Gioja looked down, and toyed with the fringe of her sash; then she said, in a small, hesitating voice——

"The Duke of Cluny, then, ought to be King of England?"

Nessie caught the words, and burst into a loud derisive cackle; while the Marquis de Lormes, now polishing the amended nail on the seam of his trousers, looked up from his final and satisfied contemplation of the result with a snigger.

"A real daisy, is n't she?" said Madame Rodriguez, in her acute contempt forgetting to modulate her accents.

The sailor looked round at her with stern eyes. "We cannot expect Miss Joy," said he, "to understand the intricacies of a Stuart pedigree, Madame Rodriguez." In that bilingual household, where almost as much English was spoken as French, Helen's pet name for "her child" was already adopted; and it seemed to cleave to the girl.

Helen had flushed under the implied rebuke. In France the *jeune fille* is hemmed in much like a state criminal; but the care with which all knowledge of the outer world is kept from her ears is nothing to the respect with which the emancipated daughter of America, free to roam the world alone if she choose, is treated in her own country by those who accept the trust of her freedom.

The fluttering query of Joy's surprised eyes, however, demanded an answer. This Helen gave with an embarrassment that sat somewhat pathetically on her.

"No, dear child, it is as Mr. Dodd says. And — well, at any rate, the English would not acknowledge the claim."

"Well," said Nessie, coming briskly forward, and taking the girl by the elbow with a vivacity which just fell short of a shake, "now you 're in the house of a real Stuart, anyhow, and if you know your history, you must feel that it 's a right-down romantic situation. My! Helen, you remember, at the convent, how we used to dream about the Young Pretender; the wondrous romances we made up about helping him to escape from his enemies, hiding with him, giving our lives to save him in his wanderings as *Monsieur le Chevalier Douglas.*"

While she was speaking Cluny had returned quietly to the room in unimpeachable evening attire. He was advancing towards the group, when Joy slowly raised her eyes and looked at him. He stopped, as if brought up by an invisible barrier.

"Indeed, Madame," said the girl then, "I, too, have had dreams about the pretender, *Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

As she spoke her fingers suddenly closed upon the fringe she was playing with, and with incredible strength tore the silk cord in two. None marked her attitude except the Duke himself and Nessie. The former turned abruptly away, the latter flew like a butterfly across the room back again to Favereau, and caught him by the sleeve.

"I say, Monsieur Favereau, did you see the look the innocent orphan threw at the Duke just now? What is Helen about? What is she doing? Oh, I do want to know!"

Favereau put up his eye-glass: "At this moment,

Madame, the Duchess seems to be explaining the nature of the contents of a case of decorations to the interesting young lady she has adopted."

Madame Rodriguez stamped her foot with fury. "Oh, you men!" she cried, "I do despise you! You never see what 's under your nose."

Favereau brought the eye-glass to focus on her little foot.

"I see, Madame," said he, without any change of tone, "the foot of Cinderella in the slipper of the princess."

Nessie's wrath fell from her on the instant. A slow smile spread over her dusky face.

"You like it?" she asked, coquetting. She pointed her toe from side to side, twitching her flounces daintily as she did so. "But what 's the use of it with these stupid skirts anyhow?"

"Madame," said Favereau, solemnly, "the inspired being who creates feminine fashions is fully aware that women's ingenuity amounts to genius. I think these skirts delightful. If a woman has a pretty foot, like truth — nay, like murder — the more you try to hide it, the more it will out."

"Here is *Maman*," said Totol's pipy voice suddenly.

CHAPTER XV

THERE was a general sensation.

Totol upon one side, the Duke upon the other, advanced together, according to rule, to lead in the lady who, in a voluminous garment of purple silk and floating veils of black lace that exhaled faint odours of lavender and pepper, looked more imposing than ever.

Her first glance was, as usual, a masterpiece of comprehensive disfavour upon the company at large. It took in the solid figure of her first son, who made no attempt to advance to her aid. Indeed, unless he had contented himself with propelling her from behind, there was nothing left for him to do in that respect. It next withered Favereau, first for the indecency of his existing at all, secondly for his exalted position in the Government of an odious Republic. Neither Joy nor Nessie were forgotten; old scores were looked, with interest, at the latter; while in the dart of displeasure vouchsafed towards the former there was a vivacity called forth by the freshness of a new grievance.

"I trust you are more rested, dear Aunt," said Helen, gently.

Under her guidance, the process of establishing the majestic relative in the armchair was accomplished without a hitch.

"There is no rest for me in this world," responded the high dame, sepulchrally. "I thank you, Charles-Edward," placing a still handsome foot, clad in a flat slipper, upon the proffered footstool. "Anatole, my shawl."

When the dutiful son had carefully enveloped his mother, he was peremptorily shown a high chair at her side. Having thus strategically divided him from the dangerous proximity of Madame Rodriguez, the Marquise, with a sigh, folded her hands and prepared herself with an air of deep resignation for whatever conversation might be inflicted upon her.

Feeling that the little figure seemed somewhat abandoned, Helen turned and boldly drew the girl into the fire-light circle.

"We have yet to thank you, Aunt," said she, "for your kind care of this young traveller. I fear she is still too timid to speak for herself."

"It did not strike me," responded the Marquise, without deigning to lift her heavy lids, "it did not strike me, Helen, during our weary journey to-day, that Mademoiselle's decided lack of conversation arose from timidity."

"Ah!" cried Helen, gaily, "if you had seen her as I did just now. Fancy, Aunt; listen, Nessie; a cruel godmother actually left this unhappy child alone for five minutes with two great ogres of men!"

The Duchess sat down on the sofa as she spoke, and drew Joy by her side. Madame de Lormes closed her eyes and leaned rigidly back upon her chair, everything in her attitude conveying that, benevolent as she was, she could not be expected to listen to this sort of thing. But Helen pursued, smiling:

"If I could, I would show you the faces of the trio as I came in. She, this creature, was just like some poor little rabbit caught in a trap. And they, Favereau and Cluny, oh" — merriment overflowed her sweet lips — "I told them they looked more alarmed even than she."

"My!" commented Nessie, sarcastically, "you don't say!"

Leaning on the back of the sofa, she had propped her chin upon her hands, and from this coign of vantage could not only exchange audacious grimaces with the Marquis across his mother's deliberately unseeing countenance, but was also enabled to keep an alert eye upon the movements of the three men who in undertones were conversing in the distance.

The more, however, her intimate circle seemed disposed covertly to snub her *protégée*, the more was Helen determined to carry off the situation in her own way. Feigning not to hear Nessie's jeer, she now continued to address the silent girl beside her in the former strain of tender gaiety.

"Though men are such great big creatures, dear," she said, "and wear hair upon their faces, and have such strange ugly clothes, when you come to know

them you will really find that they are good, kind, simple beings."

"And they are always particularly kind to little girls," interposed Madame Rodriguez, mimicking Helen's tone, "bless their simple hearts! And they never, never want to eat them up, if they are good."

Looking like a pretty Puck, she had thrust her face between her friend and Joy. This time Helen was forced to take notice of her.

"Hush, Nessie! Remember, if you please, that Joy has probably never seen a gentleman to speak to, except perhaps the chaplain or the school doctor."

"Quite Eve before the fall, in fact," said Mrs. Nessie, drawing back to exchange a glance of meaning with the Marquis Totol.

The latter could find no better way of expressing his delighted appreciation of her wit than by cracking all his finger joints in turn — a token of admiration which, for want of a better, was sufficient to stimulate Nessie to further sparkles.

"Quite Eve before the fall," she reiterated, "ain't it? Beg pardon though, Eve had been introduced to Adam, I believe. But Mademoiselle didn't seem to be so kind of skeary just now with your cousin, Mr. George P. Dodd."

"Nessie," cried Helen, flushing, "you really must not."

Here Madame de Lormes opened her eyes as suddenly as a mechanical doll that is patted on the back.

"Pray, Madame Rodriguez," she interpolated, "be

good enough not to drag the name of any son of mine into this foolish discussion."

Upon this she immediately relapsed into her feint of slumber. Joy, immovable, save for the plucking fingers, suddenly shot a glance from the elder lady's large repressive profile to Nessie's small face, quivering with mischief. Madame de Lormes sustained it, of course, with serene unconsciousness; but Nessie started with a little cry that was more than half genuine.

"My!" she exclaimed. "Don't!" and put up her fan as if for a screen. "I say, Helen, the new pet seems like the celebrated old parrot: if it does n't say much, it thinks a deal more. Her eyes are eloquent enough, anyhow."

Helen glanced down at the girl, saw nothing but long lashes trembling on small, pale cheeks. She flung her arm protectingly round her. In her gentle heart she was now as angry with Nessie as she could be angry with any one; but she was still resolved not to betray it, her one desire being to keep the poor little stranger from any suspicion of unwelcome.

After noting the action, Madame Rodriguez proceeded in her high nasal tone of irony:

"But we must not tell her that, must we? Or she would never dare to raise them again. She 's so shy, you know." Glancing round, she caught Cluny's intent look upon the group; and, inspired by a fresh imp, she hailed him. "Say, Duke, you come right along here a minute. Seems you 've been and gone and frightened a bashful lamb.

Come right here, you bad wolf, and tell her that you never harmed youth and innocence in your life; and that you just love to watch the dear little white-woolly darlings gambol on the green."

Cluny stood a moment and felt as if turned to lead. He heard his wife's rebuking voice, "Nessie, Nessie, you 're too bad!" and then the exquisite caress of her tone to Joy: "You must not mind her, she 's only a wicked tease." Then she spoke to him. There was a special accent in her voice reserved for him only. It pierced him now to the marrow.

"Yes, come to us, Cluny," she was saying, "and make amends. You did frighten her, you know."

He came forward, his limbs moving, it seemed, independently of his will.

"How can I make amends?" he asked, his eyes, dark with trouble, fixed on his wife's face. The hoarseness of his own accents frightened him, but he pulled himself together by a strenuous effort. With a semblance of gaiety, that factitious merriment which to this naturally light-hearted man seemed perhaps more hideous than it would to any other, he repeated: "How can I make amends?"

It surprised him that no one seemed to notice anything peculiar in his manner. Helen smiled back at him.

"Look up, Joy," said she. "Speak, darling, answer the Duke."

The girl's restless hands became suddenly still. "What do you wish me to say, Madame?" she asked, after a marked pause, in her small, measured voice.

"Why, tell him that you are sorry to have been a little goose, that you and he are going to be the best of friends."

Cluny's smiling lips twitched. There was a moment's expectant pause. Then Nessie broke it with a laugh.

"I reckon," said the little lady, while her mocking eyes scanned her host's countenance, "that you were in the right of it just now, Helen. It 's the Duke that 's the frightened one."

Joy looked up swiftly. The Duke burst into a jarring laugh.

"What is this?" exclaimed Favereau, breaking off his conversation with Mr. Dodd in an unwontedly abrupt manner and advancing towards the fire-place. "You seem all very merry here. Let me join in the joke."

"They have put me on the stool of repentance," said Cluny, still with laughter absurdly in excess of the humour of the situation. "'T is a trying ordeal for a retiring, and — aha, innocent man."

Here Joy startled them all by suddenly breaking into shrill merriment, which she as suddenly stifled with her handkerchief pressed to her mouth. Madame de Lormes aroused herself sufficiently from her inner meditation to throw her a look of scathing reprobation.

But Helen was delighted. So, too, was Mr. Dodd, who promptly turned round from his renewed contemplation of the famous Vandyck, with a broad sympathetic smile on his countenance.

"So she can laugh, the monkey," said the Duchess, and patted the frail shoulder beside her. "Ah, how sweet it is to hear the laugh of a young thing! Don't be ashamed of it, *ma petite*. That is a sound I shall often want to greet my ears. There, peace is signed, is it not?"

Cluny had recovered his self-control. He now advanced a step, and addressed Joy with formal courtesy.

"Let me assure you most solemnly, Mademoiselle," said he, "that while I have the privilege of receiving you in my house, I, as your host, have no desire but for your welfare."

The girl seemed to revolve these words in her mind before answering. Then she murmured, her head bent, her eyes cast down in her favourite attitude:

"Thank you."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Helen, half amused, half vexed, "how formal we are!"

CHAPTER XVI

IN bustled Dr. Lebel, with his frock-coat neatly buttoned up and a brand new tie — his notion of dinner dress never went further — rubbing his hands and diffusing a strong odour of scented soap.

"Eh, eh! I thought I was the last, but our friend the Canon," cried he, "is late, as usual, I perceive. Ah, *Monsieur le Duc!* Is that the face you bring us back from Paris? Better have stopped at home! *Madame la Marquise,* your servitor."

The lady made him a regal bow — a bow the graciousness of which was tempered by the consideration that, though he understood her digestion to a nicety, she could not blind herself to the fact that his political opinions were generally reprehensible.

"Ah, and do I see my young friend, the Marquis?" Lebel went on. "Positively, my dear Madam, he has not changed since I was called in to save his life the day of his first cigar. Do you remember, Monsieur Totol? Eh, eh, eh!" Dr. Lebel rubbed his hands again. "Rose is doing capitally — capitally," said he, in a professional undertone, to Helen. Then he wheeled his sharp eye upon Dodd. "Aha, the famous cousin!" The voluble little man

clasped the American warmly by the hand and shook it up and down, the while, from his inferior level, he gazed at him with critical, scientific scrutiny.

"What a type of the Anglo-Saxon! Ah, the fine race! Madame," said he, wheeling his tubby figure once again to the dowager, "I congratulate you."

There was a tone of real respect in his voice. He had not in truth believed the lady capable of producing anything so sensible. Helen was burning to show off her new acquisition.

"But my child, Doctor, my child," she began. "I have to be felicitated too."

Even as she spoke, the folding doors into the hall were ceremoniously thrown open.

"The Canon, Monsieur le Duc," announced the majordomo, scarcely less majestic himself than the personage he was ushering in. "Monsieur le Duc, dinner is served."

Bland, dignified, sure of himself and of his hosts, the Canon entered.

"Am I late, my dear child? What a happy gathering! *Madame la Marquise!*"

"*Monsieur le Chanoine!*"

George Dodd, looking on, smiled to himself as he watched the ceremony of greeting between the two dignitaries. It was as good as a play, he told himself. And what tickled him most was the earnestness of both the actors. The Canon bowed. The lady, who had risen to meet him, swept him one of those curtseys that are a revelation to the younger generation. Here she could conscientiously bestow

unreserved approval, not only upon the churchman, but upon the man of family. She next extended her hand. As he took it with a second inclination:

"I trust I see Madame la Marquise in good health," said he.

"Alas, Monsieur le Chanoine —— But I do not complain."

The hands parted, and upon the parting a gracefully retiring curtsey and congee were duly enacted. Cordially then the good Canon shook hands with the master of the house. Indulgently he received the introduction of the heretic American. Patronisingly he nodded to Totol.

"Madame," said he to Nessie, "we have met before."

Then Helen was able to draw his attention to Joy.

"But here is one you have not met before, Canon. This is Gioja."

Instantly the Canon dropped his man-of-the-world air, and became the priest. Benevolently, yet searchingly, he examined the little figure thrust, shrinking, forward to his notice. And as he looked, approval began to beam from his eyes.

On the other side the Doctor, both thumbs hooked into his trousers pockets (an attitude which entailed a somewhat curious arrangement of frock-coat), his scrubby, bearded chin sunk in his breast and his eyes very keen under their bushy brows, was engaged in the same scrutiny. But apparently with less satisfaction, for the lines of perplexity on his face grew deeper every moment.

"So this is the child?" said the Canon. "I have heard of you, my dear. Come, let us make acquaintance."

He took her by both hands and drew her towards him. She hung her head, a shy maiden. After his pause of investigation the priest looked at Helen, and both these worthy, innocent-minded people exchanged a silent smiling look. The work of charity seemed indeed to have been pleasantly rewarded. Then he laid his hand for a moment upon the girl's head.

"The good God," said he, "who loves the young, has dealt very tenderly with you, my child. Have you thought of thanking Him for His extraordinary protection?"

The little head, with its wealth of curls, was bowed still deeper.

"That is well," went on the priest. "Your name, the Duchess tells me, is Gioja. Gioja — Joy, a pretty name! May it be an omen of what you will bring to this house, and what you will find here for yourself. God bless you!"

The Doctor turned upon his heel with a hideous grimace, and, rubbing his chin, produced a quite audible crackle. He looked round the room, irresponsively passing Nessie's eager, interrogative gaze, his glance resting finally upon Favereau's tired face. Then the two elderly men, who knew the world, had a swift interchange of thought.

Said the Doctor's eye: "*What have we got here?*"

Said Favereau's, in a sort of agony: "*Don't ask me.*"

Then exclaimed the eyes of both: "*Ah, diable!*"

. . . . . .

"Helen," inquired Madame de Lormes, blandly, "is it intended that we should dine to-night?"

Helen started, blushed, and laughed. "My dear Aunt, my dear guests, indeed I must beg pardon."

Cluny, with alacrity, offered his arm to his formidable relative. Nessie, avowing that she was "that hollow, she could n't have held up another moment," fluttered to Favereau's side.

"Now, Canon," cried the Duchess, gaily, "I claim your arm."

Then she hesitated, looking at Joy and the three remaining men. Totol glanced askance over his shoulder, and endeavoured to hide his minuteness behind the Doctor's breadth.

"So long as they don't glue me to the school-girl," he whispered. "*Ah, ça*, Doctor, my friend, how I do hate a bread-and-butter miss!"

Helen noted her younger cousin's retreat, and the simultaneous involuntary step forward of the elder. She smiled.

"George," said she to the sailor, "you will escort Joy." Then, under pretence of settling the girl's lace, she bent over and whispered in her ear: "This gentleman, dear, will give you his arm to take you in to dinner. Why ——" Her fingers had fallen on the string of pearls. She drew it out, amused. "Ah, little Miss Vanity, what is this?" Her amusement changed to deep surprise. This, in sooth, was no school-girl's jewel. "Pearls, if you please!

And *such* pearls! Who could have given you such pearls, child?"

Cluny at the door of the room stopped involuntarily; Favereau, second in the procession, turned round with desperate deliberation, ready for emergencies. Joy looked full from one man to the other, then turned to her godmother.

"One who loved me, as I was told, sent them to me, Madame," she answered, at last, slowly and distinctly.

"Ah!" cried Helen, and the tears sprang to her eyes. "I am doing nothing but stupid things this evening," she went on, in an undertone to the Canon. "The poor mother! I might have known. Come, Canon, let us dine."

. . . . . .

"Pray," said Nessie, in a vicious undertone, to the Doctor, as she settled into her seat at the further end of the rose-decked table — "pray, what is *your* opinion of the Duchess's new daughter?"

"Madame," said Dr. Lebel, good-humouredly, while he tucked his napkin under his chin, "the young lady would seem to me to belong to a type sufficiently rare to be interesting as a curiosity to a medical mind, but not otherwise, since vivisection is not allowed on the human subject. There is one if you like who will never be ill unless she were to take poison. Red blood she has, that one! And nerves — oh, M'ame, nerves of steel!"

"Red blood!" ejaculated Nessie, contemptuously. "With that whey face?"

"A thick skin, yes. Creamy white," said the Doctor with conviction. "That is of the type."

He sucked in his first spoonful of soup with every symptom of appreciation. Nessie pondered for a moment, marking across the table how the sailor's sea-blue eyes kindled and how soft his voice grew as he turned to address his impassive partner.

"Then you don't think it is such a timid, fragile soul?" she said spitefully.

The Doctor finished his last mouthful of soup, laid down his spoon with a sigh, and polished his mouth with his napkin.

"Eh, Ma'am," said he, "you must not come to me with questions about souls. Inquire for this article over the way. Ask our friend the Canon yonder. The body of my neighbour gives me quite enough to think about."

CHAPTER XVII

THE dinner table was a large one for the comparatively small party. But Helen, who since she had entered this noble house had had but one thought, that of keeping up its dignity; who spent her time like some vestal virgin, continually feeding the sacred fires of her temple, — would have thought it desecration to replace the great carved oak by any modern, if more convenient board.

On the rare occasions when she and Cluny were quite alone in the castle, they had their meals in a gay little Chinese room looking on the conservatory. There, unless detained by their spiritual or temporal duties, the Canon and the Doctor invariably found their places laid as a matter of course at a table, just large enough to hold them all four round a silver bowl of flowers. But when there were other visitors the dining-hall was roused from its slumberous antique solemnity. And though to-night the guests were rather too far from each other for the stimulation of conviviality, the huge board was made as harmoniously gay as flowers and fruit and the accumulated silver treasure of the house could make it.

This night, to any one not gifted with the powers of Asmodeus, in the rare old-world room, between

the dark walls hung with historic tapestry, under a ceiling where, round the central quasi-royal arms of the first Duke, were blazoned all the subsequent honours the race had gathered to itself, the company assembled would have seemed, if somewhat incongruously matched, in the highest possible humour. Most of the diners, after the genial French way, talked at the top of their voices, at the same time, and with much gesticulation.

A flush had risen to Cluny's cheek, his eyes were bright. The almost hysterical reaction after the moment of mortal peril successfully escaped was upon him, together with the recklessness, the joy of his despair, if one may use so paradoxical a phrase. The conflict with conscience was over, that was one thing.

He was going to the devil, and the devil was making it easy for him at last; he would not fail to continue to show the way. The girl had accepted the situation, it seemed. The moment when, by a word, she could have blasted him was over for ever. Who would believe her now? He had but to go on as he had begun, 'to lie like a man,' and Helen, his Helen, would never know.

His laugh rang out. Never had his wit been more pointed, his illustration more apt. Even Madame de Lormes, who, as was said, regarded Cluny with the peculiar favour her lofty mind could have accorded to no lesser star of the Almanach de

Gotha, even Madame de Lormes' spirits began to react against the depression caused by the strange action of a ruling providence in permitting the reappearance of her American son. As for this latter, he found, as the minutes passed by, that the personality of his quiet little neighbour was affecting him in a more and more troubling manner.

He had first been drawn to her out of a natural instinct of manly championship evoked by his mother's ungenerous attitude on the one side, and his brother's undisguised impertinent aversion on the other. She had seemed so small, so white, so childish a thing, that he would have liked to call her "my dear," and throw his strong arm round her in protective brotherly fashion. But now, by some magnetic influence that seemed to emanate even from her very reserve, by the curious fluttering glances she flung at him from time to time, by the dimple that a little secret smile, caused by some chance remark of his printed in the half-averted cheek, by the stirring of his own blood, he felt that this child was very woman after all.

As the meal progressed, who shall say what conflicting thoughts, what emotions were revolving in the girl's own busy mind? She would not have been, as she was, human of elemental humanity, had she not felt the intoxication of the luxury and the beauty around her; luxury such as in her most ambitious dreams she could not have conceived; beauty which awoke every dormant artistic passion in an extraordinarily passionate nature.

He is master here. He is a Duke. A King's son. How I hate him! He laughs. What beautiful teeth he has! How I love him! We shall live in the same house, and it is I who will hold him. My God, how her eyes devour him! She is beautiful — but she is stupid. He looks at me. He did love me. I made him love me once. And this great American, he loves me too, and I never thought of it, or of him. How good these flowers, this champagne. He gave me champagne that day — ah, that day! If I think of it, perhaps I can make him think of it too.

"Look at the dear little one," said Helen, whispering to the Canon; "it is like a blossom opening out to the warmth and the light."

But here the Doctor's voice rose with sudden rasping insistence. He had heard the Marquis drop the fatal word "Dreyfus." He thumped the table with the handle of his knife.

"But you can't condemn a man if you can't prove him guilty: no honest man can get out of that."

"For me," Madame de Lormes was saying, as she spread out her white hands, "the man is a criminal. I bow to the decision of the tribunals of my country."

"What, Aunt," cried Cluny, mockingly, "bow to Republican Tribunals?"

"My dear Charles-Edward," said the lady, "why, the man is a Jew!"

"*Aïe, aïe, aïe!*" interrupted Totol, in an acute voice. He thrust his fingers into his ears and

waggled his wizened face from side to side in comic despair. "How can any one still talk of this weary business? Who cares, who did ever care, whether the wretched creature did or didn't? I am sure if anybody in France had a penn'orth of wit and go, he would have put a ball through his head long ago — sent him to some Devil's Island from whence he could not have come back in such a hurry to bother us all to death. Lord, Lord, the beastly saw!"

The Doctor, who had been craning his neck forward with angry intentness and rolling his ensanguined eye from one speaker to the other, here opened his mouth as if for the passage of a roar. He changed his mind, however, and closed it again with a snap. The American, who, although well acquainted with French, had not yet an ear attuned to the rapid apprehension of table-talk, was just a minute behind in the following of the conversation. Then, a fine flush of indignation mounting to his brow, he in his turn looked round the table to see if the Doctor was to be the only representative of common fairness of judgment.

Favereau was wrapt in garments of official reserve. The Duke, as he met the inquiring eye, said, over the edge of his glass:

"A dirty business altogether;" but left his guest to elucidate for himself on which side cleaved the dirt. From the contemptuous indifference of his manner it was probable he referred impartially to both.

"Poor France!" cried the Doctor at last, his pent-

up feelings bursting out irrepressibly. "If she were a person, one would have to say that she was very ill — very ill."

As the Doctor spoke, Dodd saw that he instinctively addressed himself to the Minister. The latter jerked his head with an affirmative melancholy that seemed beyond words.

"*Ah, tenez,*" said Dr. Lebel, gesticulating with a silver fork on which was stuck a large piece of pineapple, "I am a doctor, I, and I ought to know something of diagnosis. France has had some very ugly symptoms — enough to warn those who love her. Oh, I 'll pass over the surrenders of Sedan and Metz and the horrors of the Commune, over the decoration business, over the Panama business, all that belongs to the now mature generations. Take the last couple of years only. You want to know what 's the condition of the youth of France — the gilded youth — the educated, the wealthy youth, that ought to be regarded as the hope of the nation, the class that ought to lead the others? Well, then, see it put to the test; take the *Bazar de la Charité.*"

A low murmur of horror ran round the table. Cluny drew his brows together sensitively.

"But I think," said Madame de Lormes, addressing space with an air of grandiose rebuke, "that we great ladies of France were not behindhand in giving an example of heroism to the populace."

"Because, Madame," said the Canon, "you had the courage of religion which, alas ——"

"Wait, wait, my friend," interrupted the Doctor,

who, having triumphantly masticated his piece of pine-apple, was ready to speak again; "I am coming to you and to the priesthood in France presently. The women stuck to their post upon that day of shame, for the simple reason that the one section not totally corrupt in our country to-day is woman. Woman — God bless her! — as we doctors know, is ever the last to fail in great emergencies. Self-sacrifice is ingrained in her very nature. It will be a bad day for France when that last rope of salvation breaks. Yet even that ——" He made an expressive grimace. "There was a day, when I was young, when Madame George Sand was supposed (by well-thinking people) to be a baneful writer." He laughed angrily. "Now, your favourite woman writer, Mesdames of the Faubourg St. Germain, is — Gyp!"

He thrust out his underlip with huge contempt.

Totol burst into a delighted cackle. "Famously droll, all the same, Ma'ame 'Gyp,'" he cried.

Nessie gave a guilty little giggle, conscious of having found some amusement in such books. Madame de Lormes rinsed her fat taper finger in the Venetian bowl with a detached air.

"But, Doctor," said Helen, trying to follow the arguments with her earnest, sweet, but somehow slow mind — "but, Doctor, you are diverging from the question. I do not know Gyp's books, but I know how good, how charitable, my French friends are, and surely, surely it is not fair to blast all our aristocracy because of the cowardice of a few worthless

young men" — here, all unconsciously, her tender lip curved into scorn. "If Cluny had been there on that horrible day" — her eye seemed to say proudly, "*my Cluny*" — "(and it is but a chance we were not, I had actually promised the poor Duchesse d'Alençon) you would have had another story to tell."

"Ah, if Cluny had been there," interrupted Favereau, with the first warm look he had given his host that night, "if he had been there, with you, he would have done the impossible to save you. But as you would not have been saved alone — I know you — you would both have remained to perish."

"Well, as for me," yelped Totol, his face crinkling, with the most good-natured, cynical frankness, "I don't go in for pose, not I. I go in for raw truth. If people don't like it, so much the worse. I was not at the bazaar. They bore me, bazaars do. Was n't it lucky now?" He looked round amiably for congratulation. "But, faith, if I 'd been there, I 'd have looked after number one, you know. Come, come," he went on, shrilly crying down the chorus of exclamations, derisive and otherwise, "I 'm only saying what every reasonable man thinks. Come Doctor, are n't you the apostle of materialism? Are n't we all animals, and is n't it animal instinct to save one's skin, to shun pain? Oh, eh? If one goes in for free-thinking, you know, one should be consistent. Let us be consistent."

"Hear, hear!" said the Canon, softly and flung a triumphant look at the Doctor.

"Poor Totol," sighed Helen, indulgently. "Who would believe to hear him that it is the kindest little heart in all the world?"

Nessie, who had laughed openly and delightedly at the little décadent's pronouncement, now voiced the general opinion of her world to the Doctor.

"My word," said she, "what a face, Doctor! Don't you know by this time that nobody ever minds the Marquis?"

"A lucky thing, Madame," responded the other, with his prompt, incisive humour. "But for that one would have had to kill him long ago."

"It's all right," the young man was pursuing, charmed to find himself for once the centre of attention. "It's all very well for *Abbés* and women to stand still and be frizzled for the sake of a lot of people they don't care a cent about; I'd have used my legs and arms to save my own skin — *et v'là!*"

Dr. Lebel spread out his square hand with an inimitable gesture.

"My friends," said he, "the noble Marquis Anatole de Lormes has so well illustrated the first part of my thesis that I have not a word to add."

George Dodd had completely turned round in his chair to survey his brother, with the air of one who examines a totally unknown species of beast, wonder for the moment superseding all other emotion in his mind.

"Why, the little cuss is n't even ashamed of himself!" thought he.

"The whole business," said the Marquise, somewhat acidly, "has been grossly exaggerated."

"Well, now," said the undaunted Doctor, removing his napkin from under his chin and holding it stretched out in both hands, preliminary to a final scrub of beard and moustache, "so much for the upper class at the hour of test. What about the lower? If the aristocracy is, or ought to be, the head, the people are, or ought to be, the heart. That 's what we are told. What about the people — again at the hour of test? Take the foundering of the *Bourgogne?*"

Having thrown his second bomb he paused, and proceeded vigorously with the napkin operation.

"That was another bad business," said the sailor, gravely.

"The Doctor is determined not to spare us his diagnosis," said Favereau, with a rather weary smile.

How this man's heart had bled for his France; how ceaselessly had he striven to work at the task of reparation, of uplifting. How hopelessly, none would ever know but himself. The Doctor was a sanguine man. That he could still see a use in such indictments was because he yet could still hope. Deep in a sacred silence, Favereau, the devoted servant of his country, had hidden the fact that he had no illusions left.

"A bad business!" cried Lebel, jovial even in his indignation. "*Les deux font la paire!* The two match each other." He balanced his hands expressively. "The little aristocrat stamps the delicate fine ladies of his acquaintance back into the flames with heel and cane; and your rough, honest *matelot*

hits the drowning women and children on the head with oars as they would cling to his boat. Yes, they match quite nicely. It is on record," he added, dropping his satiric emphasis for a perfectly even voice, "that neither a single young swell was shrivelled in the flames, nor a single horny-handed son-of-toil perished in the ocean wave, whatever may have happened to the rest."

"Ah, you forget," said Helen, earnestly, "M. de Rothschild's groom ——"

"English, Madame — Anglo-Saxon!" said the Doctor, laconically.

The Canon folded his beautiful hands over his finger-bowl. He had bided his time, but now he was going to speak.

"I would point out to my friend the Doctor," he began, in his gentle deliberate voice, "that the Marquis made just now a remark pregnant with truth. In a word, he gave the reason for the whole deplorable state of affairs. Why, said he, should the materialist think of others? Why, indeed? If a man does not believe that 'he who loses his life shall gain it,' why should he depart from the common animal instinct of self-preservation, no matter at what cost to others? Alas, if our France is ill, is it not because she has thrust health from her, the health of the soul — religion? Religion, which made the heroines and martyrs in that catastrophe we have just spoken of."

There was a moment of impressive silence. Every eye was turned upon the Doctor. Even the most

sceptical felt that the Canon's arguments seemed at least supported by facts.

The Doctor, however, was too true a fighter to be otherwise than stimulated by a direct attack.

"Aha, I expected you there, my friend," he cried; "but I 'm ready for you. I 'm not denying that religion, as a human institution, is a remarkably useful thing for the morals of the people. But, like all other human institutions, Canon, I 'll make you observe that it is as much subject to the nation's corruption as any other. Let us look at your religion in France. What has it done for you? Has it upheld justice? How have you good priests come out of the Dreyfus case?"

Totol again gave his dismal howl, and again put his fingers in his ears. Nessie supported him with a series of little shrieks. Even the Duke and Favereau raised their voices. But the Doctor had a powerful organ, and he outbellowed them all.

"What about your holy brothers of *La Croix?* What about your Christian attitude towards the Jew? What doctrines of peace, of justice, of the charity that thinketh no evil, have been preached to the most ignorant hamlets in the country? Where would the priest have led France to-day?"

Every question was emphasised by the darting of a stubby forefinger, as if the speaker were thrusting a rapier under the well-covered ribs of his friend. Helen threw towards Cluny a look of comical despair. The inevitable battle began in earnest.

Without any further loss of placidity, without heeding her aunt's shocked gestures of utter reprobation, she awaited the Canon's defence to this violent counter attack.

"My good Doctor," he began, as soon as he could make himself heard, and his placid, well-bred accents were in marked contrast to the other's broad vehemence, "far be it from me to deny that injudicious things have been said and pernicious advice given from quarters from which no teaching but that of the Gospel should have been heard. But that, my friend, is because, if the teaching is Divine, the ministry of the church is yet human, and *errare humanum est.* The errors of humanity, of the believer, of the priest, do not affect the divinity of the principle, any more than the corruptness of the judge can alter the inherent quality of justice. It is not for me to pronounce upon my colleagues — thank God! I do not either impugn or defend them. All I maintain is that if you take away from man the belief in his soul, that is, in his ideal, that is, in his God, you take away from him all motives for righteousness. Nay, the only logical conclusion, then, is that of Monsieur le Marquis — every man for himself."

"There you are," cried the Doctor, who, finding himself beaten upon the frontal attack, with the fighter's instinct nimbly leaped upon another breach. "Listen to him: 'it is not for me to pronounce — thank God!' Even you — even he" — appealing to the table — "is suffering from the universal disease.

There is not one of you who can face the truth. The Duke has already shown that he cannot."

Cluny started. The Doctor proceeded inexorably.

"Yes, even you, Duke, from the height of your chivalrous honour, all you can find for your unhappy country is contempt: 'I wash my hands of it. These things are too dirty for me to touch.'"

Cluny smiled, smiled to hide a horrible return of invading misery: *Alas, his chivalrous honour! And that girl's eyes upon him, and Helen's worshipping glance ever seeking him across the table.*

"So much for you," pursued the Doctor. "You're one type. There's Monsieur Favereau, that's another. He folds himself up in his leaves; you'll never get at the thought of him. 'Respect my silence, respect my sorrow.' Useful, is it not?"

Favereau laughed with some bitterness. "Wrong in your diagnosis for once," said he, drily. "I take things philosophically, my good Esculapius."

"But surely, Doctor," said Dodd, in his sound, if rather laboured French, "if a man cannot help his country by speaking, the best he can do is to keep silence."

"But cannot every man help his country by speaking?" inquired the Doctor, explosively. "What help is there for a nation if all its honest men preserve the policy of dignified silence, and so leave the rogues, the cranks, and the decadents to speak for her, to rule her? What is to become of a country that has no moral courage?"

"For me," declared Madame de Lormes, in the

tone of one putting an end to a discussion, "I am amazed at the patience with which you all listen to Monsieur le Docteur. I should call that man a bad patriot who takes part with the enemies of his fatherland."

Dr. Lebel looked at her with his jaw on one side and much humour in his eye.

"Third type," said he, quietly; "Madame la Marquise represents the class of the wilfully blind. 'It is impossible that our army should go wrong; it is impossible that so holy a paper as *La Croix* should mislead us.' But your generals have admitted forgery, fear of the enemy, false witness." Then, drawing himself together and answering himself with an air of great dignity, unconsciously mimicking the Marquise's manner: "'Monsieur, if our generals committed forgery, it was from the noblest of motives.'—'And *La Croix*, Madame? That rag that you, an intelligent woman, know to be propagating lies under the cloak of the monk, lies that would plunge this country into a war for which we were never worse prepared, provided that such a war secured the overthrow of the government.'"

"Sir," interrupted the Marquise, tartly, opening her eyes to throw a severe glance at the speaker, "it is not from you, free-thinker, that I should expect justice towards ministers of my holy religion."

"I am answered," said the Doctor, irrepressibly.

"It is strange to me," said the sailor, who had been following this unexpected indictment of his

host's own country with great interest, "that such a state of things as you describe can co-exist with such marvellous prosperity, such scientific advance, as I have seen manifested since my return to Paris, which struck even me, a member of the richest, of the most scientific country in the world."

"My young friend," said the Doctor, and planted his forefinger on the table, "you have hit it. France is prosperous, extraordinarily prosperous, but it is only material prosperity, and every Spartan virtue is dying out. Is it because of her very riches? I know not. Will our wealth yet help us out of our ditch? I know not. Riches, when used for patriotism, as, by the way, England is using hers just now ——"

"I felt," said Madame de Lormes, audibly enough to the Duke, "that Monsieur Lebel would come to taking the part of our enemies."

But the Doctor proceeded without heeding. "But our science. Ah, young man, there is the salvation of our country, there alone do I see hope ahead! Science is great in France. Literature is debased, art is debased, the army is corrupt, politics are a sink, religion is not a guide but a tool. Science we have yet."

"What," said the Canon, in a loud voice, "is that all we have to hope in? Then it is indeed unhappy France!"

"Oh, Doctor," exclaimed Helen, "you know as well as I do how much good there is about us, even in this little corner of the world. How simple and

brave and pious and charitable is our poor peasantry, how devoted their doctor, what an apostle their priest!"

The Doctor turned his eyes upon her and the light of battle went out of them, to be replaced by an extraordinary tenderness.

"Ah, Madame," he cried, "have I not already said that there are still good women?"

"And good men!" cried the Duchess, gaily. "Cluny, we have heard enough pessimism this evening: speak for your beautiful France. Speak!"

The Duke's blood rose at the call. Speak for France! Who could do it better than he? Who could love his France better than he? Not indeed the France of a corrupt self-seeking oligarchy, nor yet the France of advanced thought and far-seeing science, but the France of the old traditions, the nation of all wit, of all elegance, of chivalry, of refinement! France of the *gentilhomme*, who did brave deeds with a jest; who bragged not, but did. In the return of this royal France it was part of his creed to believe, to believe that when her hour struck from all over the fair country, his compeers would arise to uphold her and take their rightful place again by throne and fleur-de-lys. Words crowded to his tongue, fire sprang into his eyes. . . . Then, even as he opened his mouth, he felt upon him the gaze of Joy. A cold sweat broke upon him; he paused as if paralysed. After a moment's painful silence, with a second revulsion the blood rushed to his face again.

"Speak for France!" he cried, with sudden anger, flinging his napkin on the floor; "I, speak for France!" The bitterest laughter rose to his lips from the bottom of his sore heart. "What have I to say? Lebel is right. We are a worthless race."

CHAPTER XVIII

"SAPERLIPOPETTE!" said the Doctor, genuinely disconcerted by this unexpected conversion to his views.

The colour had faded from Helen's face as she rose and broke up the circle. Anxiously her eyes sought to meet her husband's, but in vain. Many times had Cluny listened to the diatribes of the country doctor, without manifesting any other emotion than gentle laughter. Many times indeed had he, boyishly mischievous, deliberately started the friendly antagonists upon one of their heated discussions.

But the Doctor had been unpardonable to-night. Evidently Cluny's endurance had its limits; even she, she told herself rebukingly, had not sounded all the depth, all the refinement of that rare nature.

"Lebel was really beyond everything just now," said she to the Canon, as they ceremoniously returned to the drawing-room.

"Alas, Madame," said the Canon, wistfully, "one must pardon all the same. Poor fellow, he knows not what he says."

A chill had fallen over them all — a chill which became accentuated on their return to the library. Helen, yearning to have her arm round her husband

and lay tender fingers upon that hidden sore place she felt within him, had lost for the moment her usual power of drawing her guests into comfort and sympathy. Thus, after half an hour's ungenial, disjointed conversation, every one was glad to hear Madame de Lormes announce her intention of conveying her exhausted body and her sorely tried soul to retirement for the night.

Upon this relief Totol skipped off with Nessie to the billiard-room.

Then the Canon faded out of the company: it was his hour for the night visit to the chapel. And the Doctor, after several noisy yawns, declared his intention of trotting home as soon as he had had a last glance at his patient, Rose.

Helen was suddenly struck by the wanness of Joy's face.

"Say good-night, my dear," said she, after kissing her on the forehead. "I shall take a peep in at you by-and-bye."

"Good-night," said the girl, passively. Then she paused a second; the sailor was next to her.

"Good-night, Miss Joy," said he heartily, and extended his hand.

After a second's pause she slid her fingers into it, and felt them engulfed in a warm, close, protecting clasp. His eyes were vainly seeking hers. "What an ugly great hand," she thought.

"Good-night, Sir," said she to the Duke. And within herself: "*And you, I love you, and now I shall again touch your hand.*"

Cluny was struggling with an absolutely physical repulsion.

In this moment of hardly perceptible hesitation, Favereau, the ever-watchful, stepped quite naturally between him and the girl.

"Mademoiselle, I wish you a very good night," he said in a tone that was admirably balanced between the paternal and the ceremonious.

She shrank in her turn, but could not avoid submitting to his handshake, which was at the same time so manœuvred as to dismiss her from the room.

"*That horrid old man. That bad old man! How I hate him!*" she said to herself all the way up the stairs.

When in the smoking-room the Duke sank into his chair behind his cigar the strain of pretence was at length relaxed, and — for life is full of these ironical compensations — he welcomed the moment when he could give way and listen to his own pain.

Neither Favereau nor Dodd, likewise extended on their lounges, seemed disposed to make any tax on his powers of entertainment. Silence therefore reigned in the room, a silence grateful to each in his own mood, broken only on occasions by the distant click of balls in the billiard-room beyond or a faint squeal from either or both of the light-hearted players.

At first Cluny smoked mechanically. Fragments of the evening conversation, echoes of the Doctor's rough voice, mingled with the turmoil of his thoughts — thoughts by turns self-accusing and self-exculpating.

By-and-bye the red glow died away on the brown leaf, his hands dropped inertly on the long cushioned arms.

A worthless race! 'Even you, even you, Duke, from the height of your delicate honour — unhappy France!' Unhappy France, indeed!

Was Lebel right? Was decay in their very blood! His delicate honour! 'Oh, these things are too dirty for me to touch!' God help us! What! This affair where men, his countrymen, had lied for a good end — for a good end no doubt, as they thought — his 'honour' had been too delicate even to speak of it. And yet how was he better to-day than the false witness, than the men who forged 'for a good purpose,' as they said? And Favereau, the upright, the benevolent, he had lied too — nay, had suggested the lie, for a good purpose — oh, for a good purpose! 'The aristocrat thrusts the delicate fine lady with heel and cane back into the flames. The honest sailor clubs the drowning woman, the child, back into the water with his oar.' Why? Totol gave the reason. 'To save themselves, pardieu!' Helen had cried, 'If my Cluny had been there!' Oh, God! oh, God! oh, God! — oh, devil! Her Cluny! 'You are brave gentlemen! Two men against a girl.' Brave? Aye, 'take them at the test, neither moral nor physical courage.' What had he, the man of delicate honour, done with the woman — the child? Into what flames had he not thrust her, back into what waters of perdition and of despair? And why, why, why? Totol

had screeched the infamous reason for him : 'To save himself, pardieu !' Himself? Ah, no, not that! To save her, to save Helen!

The man's whole soul surged on the tide of passionate tenderness towards his wife. The vision of Helen, pure, simple, loving, rose before his mind, the most beautiful image of peace, of healing, surrounded with the perfume of all womanliness, all loveableness.

For a moment he saw himself on his knees, his head upon her lap, and he pictured to himself his own rapture of relief in confiding his trouble to her. Had she not always soothed away his difficulties? Had she not always understood him as nobody else ever did? Then his own cry to Favereau came back to him like the howl of the lost soul. No, Helen could not understand! She is not one of those women that could understand. Oh, less than ever now! If at one moment he had a chance of redemption, now it was gone. Yes, Favereau had shown him the right road. Both had quailed from its steepness, but now they had wilfully entered on the descent, and the mire of it could never be brushed from their garments.

. . . . . .

Luxuriously outstretched in his great leather armchair, George Dodd, delightfully at ease both morally and physically, his square head thrown back, his

sea-blue eyes watching vaguely the opalescent spirals of a choice Havana's vanishing life, George Dodd was seeing strange visions in the smoke.

Why, the little creature has bewitched me! Who would have thought it?

It was a revelation. There was humour also in the situation. He felt a vast astonishment at himself, but withal an extraordinary warm expansion.

I could crush her with one hand, and yet the little thing — one of those glances of hers, where the shy woman peeps from inside the heart of the child — makes me feel downright silly. George P. Dodd, what's come to you? You always said the sea would be your only mistress, your only bride. What, anyhow, has a sailor to do with a wife? . . . Unless she had eyes like that, and baby-hair ——

At this point there suddenly rose before his eyes a picture of a small face, half child's, half woman's, under a bridal veil, and his strong heart began to thump.

I'm bewitched, and — well, what in the wide world is to hinder me, if I choose? Mighty Neptune! I believe I'd rather to-night kiss that little creature on the lips than sink the 'Merrimac.' In a bad way, George, my boy!

A smile, however, hovered on the sailor's face. While he tried mentally to shake his head at himself, the deep delight evoked by the mere lover's dream invaded his whole being.

. . . . . .

As Favereau mechanically smoked one cigarette

after another and reviewed the events of the night in his clean orderly mind, he was conscious, with that precision which accompanied all its operations, that this evening's work had brought him to a critical epoch in his life.

For years he had thought himself finally shorn of all illusions, for years he had looked upon life as an observer: emotions, whether pleasurable or the reverse, being to him merely objective. Life, he had believed, had ceased to have a personal meaning to him from the day when he had definitely given up all hope of those things that go to make a man's life — love, marriage, paternity. His work he gave to his country, not with any personal ambition, not even with any hope of lasting influence, but from the same sense of duty which ruled the rest of his actions — the duty of acting the part of an honest man while he still cumbered the earth.

Yet to-night he found himself separated by a gulf from the moral standpoint of this morning. And, by the pain he felt in the sense of loss, he realised now many illusions he had still unconsciously held, recognised how impossible it is for man to avoid his personal share in others' existence, in others' responsibilities. A profound conviction of the sorrow of the world had ever been with him, yet he had flattered himself to be able to pass through this wretched masquerade they call life, not "gravely," as a certain thinker advises us, but as that highest type of philosopher, the true humourist. To-night, however, his whole system was crumbling around him. He had

laid his foundations upon the certitude of his own moral strength, of his own personal worth. To him also the Doctor's words recurred as an echo: "*Take them at the test, they fail!*" In a larger spirit than that of his unhappy accomplice, and from a different standpoint, he viewed his own fall as part of the miserable inheritance of humanity, accepted it without a moment's weakening, even without remorse. But he was sad, sad to the soul.

The chance of keeping that horror of disillusion from Helen? It was worth it. I would do it again for that. Poor Helen — my beautiful Helen! And I, who thought that I could direct her fate, thought that the greatness of my sacrifice must secure her happiness! 'What man could keep himself, year in year out, on Helen's level?' Thus her husband — the husband I gave her! What man? I could have done it — I! and he could not. I knew how to love her. She loved me always as a child does. I could have taught her to love me as a woman. What devil inspired me? I thought it was the voice of God, the voice of right, just because it was so hard. Monstrous selfishness, a crime, to unite my staid manhood to her bright youth! Oh, miserable world; oh, unhappy, groping humanity! Our greatest sacrifices are almost ever our greatest mistakes. Where is God in all this? Where is right? And yet — and yet! What was it Cluny said? Could I, could any other man but this Cluny himself, have given to that woman's face her aureole of joy? Youth

calls to youth, beauty to beauty, brilliancy to brilliancy. Had she been mine the poignancy of anguish which now threatens her soul could never have reached her — it never would: but neither could have reached her that poignancy of bliss.' He stroked his grey beard with a steady hand. *To-night how beautiful she looked! Oh, it shall not all be lost! Helen, if there be a ministering God, and I must lose my soul for it, you at least shall keep your earthly paradise!*

He flung his final cigarette into the dish, and looked at Cluny, whose face was now compressed into lines of pain, whose eyes were closed. He rose from his chair, went over to his friend, laid a kind hand upon his shoulder, and said in his ear:

"Cluny, it is getting late. Helen will be waiting for you."

Cluny looked up. And astonishment first, then a wistful incredulous questioning, came hungrily into his eyes.

"Go to her," repeated Favereau, and paused. "My God, man," he went on in a passionate whisper, "have you not got the present still? He who knows how to hold the present must not fear the future. Go!"

Cluny sprang to his feet like one recalled to life. His was a nature that must utterly despond or buoyantly hope; but too eagerly will such natures seize upon hope again. He wrung Favereau's hands. "God bless you," said he. "What should I have

done without you? Ah, Favereau, if we get out of this, I shall be a very different man."

Favereau looked after him as he hurried from the room, forgetting even to bestow a good-night word upon the dreaming Dodd still sunk in his armchair; there was no lightening of the melancholy eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

HELEN gently turned the handle of the door and peeped in. The small lamp was still glowing under its pink shade over the girl's bed, but Joy was asleep.

The Duchess crept softly to her side and looked down. So strong was the mother instinct in this childless woman's heart that she, who had never tasted the delight of the "good-night" nursery visit, who had never known the stealthy gloating over one's treasure — one's very own! — who had never known the rush of protecting tenderness over the helpless being that owes one the very breath of life, felt something of the sweet pain of all these emotions stir her heart over the child of her adoption. Here at last was a child: and she, who had been cheated of motherhood's first joys, was now pleased to cheat herself with the fancy that she could still trace some baby graces in her foundling. Childish enough looked the sleeping face in its soft relaxation; childish the aureole of curling hair, as pale as morning sunshine and as fine as gossamer threads; childishly pouted the lips and childishly lay the small, curved hands, one flung outside the pink coverlet, the other curling up to the mouth. Just so Helen had seen many a peasant child lie in its wooden cot.

Ah! — she bent closer — *what a sobbing sigh! The little one had been weeping: the long lashes were still matted and wet with tears! Yet it was only as a child may cry, for now in her sleep she smiled and — what was this?* Shining between her fingers was the string of pearls: Joy had fallen asleep holding them to her lips.

Helen's heart melted altogether within her. In her loneliness, her strangeness, her fatigue and excitement, this poor child had turned for consolation to the only thing that had come to her from her mother — "from one who loved her!"

"What do you know of my mother, Madame?" That had been that first question she had asked when they had found themselves alone together. Alas! what could Helen tell that innocence about her mother?

"She is dead. She loved you. She wished me to have you," had been the hesitating answer. The girl had given her a quick, strange look, and had fallen back into her shy silence.

The thought of the poor mother and of her sacrifice, the pity of it, brought the tears to Helen's eyes. Then, after her fashion of carrying everything beyond the world, she prayed God to help her to be a faithful mother to His forlorn creature; she prayed for a blessing upon her new duties, and most earnestly for one upon the young creature.

"Oh, my God," she said, "let these be the last tears of sorrow that she may shed in this house!"

. . . . . .

As Helen re-entered her own sitting-room, she found her husband seated by the wood fire. He looked up and his face became softened with that look of love and admiration so long known, yet as ever dearly prized by her — that look which, after fourteen years, had still the power of making her heart flutter like that of a happy girl.

"I have just been looking at the child; she is asleep." And, as she spoke the words, the thought of the ineffable joy it would have been to look at a child of his and hers struck her to the heart like a dagger stab. But in the very grip of her own pain she noticed how his face changed. In an instant she was on her knees beside him, her arms round his neck. "But we are very happy, Cluny, are we not?"

He caught her to him with the same extraordinary passion he had already shown that evening. She disengaged herself to look into his face, her hands pressed against his shoulders. The loose sleeves of her dressing-gown fell back from her white arms.

Beautiful! Oh, she was that indeed! thought the man, as he contemplated her. But it was not for her beauty alone he now loved her as he did — his Helen!

He clasped his feverish hands round her wrists, and madly kissed the lovely arm up to the soft curve of the elbow.

"My saint, my love, my wife!" cried he, almost beside himself.

Through his ardour, the sense of the trouble

seething within him betrayed itself to her quick feminine perception. She began to tremble.

"Cluny, what is it? Tell me. You are not yourself, you have not been yourself this evening."

"Have I not?" said he, and devoured her lovely face with his piteous eyes. "Forgive me, my beloved."

Again she put her arms about him, and drew his head with her maternal gesture to beautiful rest on her bosom.

"Do not speak," said she, "I think I know." The echo of many tears had come into her voice. She paused for a moment. "You have never let me guess it," she said at last, "till to-night. But you, too, have mourned for our silent house, for our love that has been so perfect, so great, yet has had to remain so sterile."

He interrupted her with broken words, not daring to lift his head from her confiding breast. "His happiness," he murmured, "required nothing more. He had never felt the want of children, so long as he had her. She was his all so long as he kept her. . . ."

She smiled as she answered, but he felt only how her bosom heaved.

"You are too good to me, love. Indeed, I have been too happy. No, no, do not call me a saint! 'T is so easy to help others a little. And you know, Cluny, you know, I try to be good; I am afraid of the judgments of God. You all talk of my charity, my piety. It 's not true, it 's all cowardice. I want,

so to speak, to bribe the Almighty into leaving me my happiness. Oh, I feel such terror sometimes!"

Her voice came more faintly. The man tightened his grasp of her and lifted his head. Their eyes sought each other's almost like two frightened children's.

"Oh, Cluny," she cried, "do *you* ever feel afraid, too?"

"My God, yes!"

"Ah, darling!" It was a great cry: all the joy, the pride of the woman loved, rang in it.

After a pause, during which the warm comfort of her presence, the magic of her beauty, the intoxication of his love, began to invade the man's whole being, she suddenly rose to her feet. Unconsciously triumphant in her loveliness she stood, looking down at him, half shyly, half victoriously. The long ropes of her hair, unpinned but not yet untwisted, fell on either side of her shoulders to her knees. The pillar of her throat rose proudly. The firm sweep of her bosom showed superb under the folds of lace. Through drooping lids her sweet eyes caressed him, her teeth gleamed between lips parted for a little happy laugh.

"Since *mon seigneur*," she said, "still loves his old wife, after all, why should either he or I fear?"

And Favereau's words once more echoed in Cluny's ear:

"*You have the present still, man. He who knows how to hold the present must not fear the future.*"

BOOK III. — A WEEK LATER

"And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night. . . . In the morning thou shalt say, would God it were even! And at even thou shalt say, would God it were morning!" — DEUTERONOMY.

CHAPTER XX

THE lower terrace walk beneath the sun-warmed crumbling wall, against which the apricots merged from green immaturity to red and yellow pulpiness; where well-nigh all the year round the bees hummed over the old-fashioned thyme and balm-mint beds; where it was a black day indeed if there was not at least a few rays of sunshine to be trapped — this was the Canon's favourite walk. And here at certain hours, changing according to the seasons, he was wont to read his breviary; wont also, on rare occasions, to grant himself a delightful snatch of leisure over some well-worn little ivory-yellow volume — "Virgil's Georgics," from the founts of Aldus Manutius, it might be. Balmy-scented, sun-kissed were these moments of self-indulgence, sung to by the humming of those bees that Virgil loved, shot through with a pipe of birds, woven in with colour and shadow.

These sheltered twenty yards of homely garden beauty (so different from the almost royal pleasure-grounds originally laid out by the pompous Le

Nôtre) were therefore known as "the Canon's walk." And "the Canon's hour," understood to be piously devoted to the breviary, was respected by all the inhabitants of Luciennes down to the smallest *blouse* in the garden. So much so, indeed, that the good priest was not without some twinges of conscience on the occasions above mentioned, when (the spirit of Maro irresistibly alluring him to commune through flower and sunshine and wing-murmurs) he had yielded, and lingered in his retreat beyond the appointed limit. Nay, there had been days when the crime of having hurried ever so little over the breviary in order to dally with the fascinating pagan had actually lain heavy on his soul!

On this morning, though the autumn had advanced by yet another week since the radiant afternoon when the guests had arrived at Luciennes; though red and yellow leaves played the part of ruddy ghosts of long-eaten apricots against the wall; though in the wild balsam beds, under the shelter of the wall's shadow, heavy beads of dew still marked the passage of last night's frost, so much summer lingered in this happy spot that the Canon, with half his prayers still unread, had lapsed by almost imperceptible degrees into his favourite corner on the ancient stone bench. It was quite warm in the sun; the bees were very melodious, the smell of the herbs heavy sweet. The very amiable little devil that had charge of the Canon's weaknesses found his task unwontedly easy. Somehow the breviary slipped from the Canon's knees.

The Canon knew the words by heart; he went on murmuring, in tune with the rustling leaves —

> "Spiritus enim meus super mel dulcis; et
> hereditas mea super mel et favum.
> Alleluia, alleluia."

And away floated the soul of the Canon on the wings of bees and breeze.

"Sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. How beautiful!" he thought; and while his delicate scholarly mind moved in harmony with his thankful heart, his eyes were lost in the blue of a happy sky.

But —

> "Hinc ubi jam emissum caveis ad sidera cœli
> Nare per æstatem liquidam suspexeris agmen . . .
> Contemplator,"

whispered the imp in his ear. Back came the Canon's soul from the realms of spiritual sweetness to a charming pagan earth, astir with the humming of Virgil's honey seekers.

In some most extraordinary manner the little vellum Aldine (heathen from titlepage to colophon) now lay upon his knee! It opened slowly, quite of its own accord, like a flower unfolded to the sun, at the very passage — that favourite page of the Canon's, upon which the set of the print on the yellowing paper, the harmonious proportions of word and line, the shapely Petrarcan lettering, were dear to him as the sight of a well-known and well-loved face.

. . . . . .

"Aha, my friend, I catch you at it!" said a loud jeering voice.

Thus rudely recalled from floating circles of Elysian peace, the Canon opened his eyes with a start.

"I was meditating," he began, with great dignity. "It is a frequent habit of mine to take a text of my breviary for morning contemplation."

He spoke, serenely persuaded of his own blameless innocence, when his glance fell upon the volume open on his knee. His jaw dropped.

"So I see," cried the Doctor, with his great laugh. "Aha!" and nipped the book from his friend's lap.

The Canon blushed, then winced to see his delicate treasure caught by two leaves like a butterfly by its wings. He stretched out a protecting hand, which the Doctor, glorying in his advantage, met with an elbow.

"'Surely,' says the Duchess, 'you would not think of disturbing the Canon at his meditations!' 'Oh, yes,' says the gardener, 'Mr. the Canon is down there, but Mr. the Doctor is not dreaming of disturbing him at this hour?' And Jacques, sweeping the valley over there, with his yelp: 'Not that way, *m'sieu!* Not that way! *M'sieu le Chanoine* is praying.' Aha! I could get myself a reputation for sanctity too on those terms. Eh, the fine meditation!" And the Doctor read out—

> "'Illum adeo placuisse apibus mirabere morem
> Quod nec concubitu indulgent, nec corpora segnes
> In Venerem solvunt, aut fetus nixibus edunt.'

Tiens, tiens, I could meditate on that myself, mere curer of bodies as I am."

The poor Canon writhed, as much perhaps on

account of the Doctor's butchery of lilt and quantity as from the human irritation of one caught napping, in every sense of the word. The colour deepened on his cheek. The hand which conveyed the comforting pinch of snuff to his nostrils shook perceptibly.

But the few seconds of time necessitated for the absorption of the Spanish mixture was sufficient for the spiritual to reconquer his ordinary dominion over the human Canon. Those whose rule of perfection it is to engage in set consultation with conscience at least three times a day are apt to find the still small voice extremely penetrating on other occasions as well. The irate gleam in the old man's eye was quenched. He flung quite a shamefaced glance at the Doctor, and, closing his snuff-box, said with humility:

"I hope I have never posed as a saint, Doctor. But if I have unwittingly led any one to think that of me, I am justly punished by being found out at the very moment when I was giving full vent to self-indulgence and sloth. Occasions of too frequent occurrence indeed!"

The Doctor looked quickly at the stately white head bent, and the expression of his good-natured mocking face changed. He cleared his throat, closed the Aldine carefully and laid it back on the other's knee. Next he stooped and picked up the breviary, dusted it and deposited it on the bench.

"Oh," he said then, in a detached voice, "if there were more of them like you, I'd begin to believe in the use of saints! A pinch from your box, Canon."

Their eyes met. It was with comfortable sympathy and understanding.

"Ah, aha, hum!" said the Doctor and snuffed noisily. "Well, now, my gossip, that I have run you down, I suppose we can have a few moments' quiet talk. Not to beat about the bush: how do you think things are going on with our friends up yonder?"

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. The Canon turned towards him with some surprise and concern.

"What makes you say that?"

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" — Lebel shrugged his shoulders — "to have your opinion on the subject, I suppose. Look here, my good sir, you are the keeper of consciences up there, I am keeper of mere bodies, even as I said just now. But we are always coming across each other for all that." He saw a flicker of controversial triumph in the Canon's eye, and hastily proceeded with his good-natured, brutal frankness: "I have not looked you up to waste my time upon arguments of theodicy, you may be sure: I have too much to do with this life and this life's mechanisms just now. Briefly, then, you have influence that I, rightly or wrongly, cannot pretend to. I'll not discuss it. Well, then, you had better use it." Again the stubby finger came into play. "Get the Duchess," said the Doctor, slowly, "to rid her house of that girl."

The most profound astonishment, gradually merging into consternation, became depicted, in waves so to speak, on the Canon's face.

"The child?" he stammered.

"Child!" snorted the Doctor. "Now, look here, Canon, do not speak in a hurry. If you pretend to be able to guide souls, you ought to base your judgments upon something more than mere externals. Oh, you call that little minx a child on the strength of her baby curls and her little face? Now just give yourself the trouble to reflect for a moment upon the effect that child produces upon the men of the community. There's Mr. Dodd, the fine Yankee fellow. Eh? What does he think of the child?"

More and more disturbed became the priest's face.

"Now that you say so," he remarked hesitatingly, "of course — Mr. Dodd — indeed, I believe, at least, I have noticed, he is certainly not indifferent to Mademoiselle Joy's presence."

"Indifferent!" snapped the Doctor. "The man does not know what he's doing when she's near him. He's mad for her — mad! Well, now, let us take the Marquis next, Totol — little idiot! He hates and fears young girls, that one. With a girl he has to mind his *p's* and *q's*. Innocence and ignorance and timidity — all that sort of thing bore him. He's afraid of it. He has no use for it. You know his jargon; oh, he's a pretty type! He avoided the little one like the plague, that first evening. And now! Have you seen them together? seen the way he looks at her? Have you watched him manœuvre to get out of range of Mamma's eyes and inveigle Mademoiselle into some deserted room or other? Come, you have seen them together! He does not seem to see a school-girl in her, now — does he?"

The Canon's lips moved voicelessly. The anxiety in his eye grew more intense.

"Well, since you mention it," he at length murmured, "once or twice I have, in truth, seen the Marquis de Lormes with the young girl. This morning in the garden —" He passed his yellow silk handkerchief over his brow. "But I assure you," he went on eagerly, "I assure you, she did not appear in the least inclined to encourage his attentions. It was quite the reverse."

The Doctor looked at the Canon with indulgent contempt.

"Quite the reverse," he repeated ironically. "Quite so, my dear Canon. That is the type, to the life. Oh, don't I know her, that one! Women of that type never do seem to encourage any one, and yet the mere fact of their presence in the room will set every man's blood astir. Look you, my friend, I speak from experience. I — I, old fellow that I am, I myself can feel the little demon." He stopped to laugh out loud at the horror-struck expression of the priest. "But don't be afraid," he went on jeeringly, "it is a matter of no consequence with me. I just note the symptoms as a scientific fact, and that is all. As for you, you have worked so long at, and succeeded so well in, transforming yourself into an old woman — Oh, well, you can hardly even understand! Now let me tell you in one word what your child is: she's a dangerous woman! Do you want to have another definition — the scientific one? *C'est une troublante.* Would you like an historical one? She is what your

Churchmen in the middle ages used to call a *Succubus*. And were we still in those good old days ('pon my soul I almost wish we were!), she would be put on her trial, you would sit on the bench, and she would be burned as a witch. Listen! Only a few years ago, Madame la Duchesse yonder insisted on taking me to a charity fancy fair at Versailles. A monster fair it was; every kind and condition of men and women. The good matrons of the Faubourg who organised it (our Marquise in the thick of it of course) had entrusted the flower stalls to the 'ladies of the profession,' because they would be the most attractive to the gentlemen. Eh, eh, charity covers a multitude of sins! Well, there was one there of that lot, a tall one, a sort of lily to look at, still and white and slender. And all round her, I tell you, my poor friend, it was like a swarm of bees! It hummed with men, young and old, soldiers, actors, dukes, artists, Jews and Christians, what do I know — all our golden youth, and all the silver age. Bah! I saw a minister, a surgeon, a diplomat, and the last poet. Not a flower left on her stall, nor a leaf; heap of gold pieces before her. She would not take the trouble to sweep them into her till. Once or twice she opened her mouth, showing the tip of her white teeth, only wide enough for the passage of a disdainful word. Occasionally she looked up, and shot a glance always in the same direction at one particular man. Brooding eye of fire! By the way (you may not have noticed it), our Mademoiselle Joy has, on occasions, when she looks at a par-

ticular person, something of that sort of glance. Oh, it is the type! That lily, Canon, was the famous Cora May."

The Canon started, and then instantly endeavoured to cover his movement. The ejaculation on his lips he repressed. His face became grey white. The Doctor, engrossed in his own theme, proceeded with gusto:

"And the young man she looked at was the rich Hungarian, Count Wallsee."

Again the priest started; the sensational ruin of Count Wallsee and his no less sensational suicide had reached even his hermit ears.

"Oh, it is the type!" M. Lebel went on. "And this precious orphan of the Duchess has got the type, my friend. She reminds me of no one so much as of la Belle Cora herself."

The Canon's happy morning, his mood of charming, if reprehensible placidity, was rudely disturbed indeed. He knew the Doctor well; and, while lamenting his irreligious convictions, he respected him as an earnest worker and a shrewd intelligence, and he loved him for his unfailing all-human goodness. From such a man a warning was not a thing to be lightly put aside.

The two again looked at each other, and it was the same apprehension that clutched at both their hearts. These were lonely men. The one from vocation and deliberate sacrifice, the other from the accident of life. Both, in their different ways, filled their hours by ceaseless work for others. All they knew of home, of the grace of existence, of the joys round the hearth,

was given to them by Helen. And all the rooted tenderness a man has in him to give wife and child, all its overshadowing solicitude, its care and thought, its ceaseless preoccupation, these two solitary men had almost unconsciously, most purely, given to Helen.

The Canon, of course, was fully convinced that the motives which for fourteen years had induced him so persistently to refuse all the preferments periodically offered to a man of his name, attainments and saintly reputation, were an unmixed devotion to his little flock and a humble desire of working out his salvation in comparative obscurity. That Dr. Lebel, again, had grown grey by the bedside of the country poor, when the same amount of work might have placed one of his capacity in the first rank of his profession in Paris, was solely due (if you believed him) to his intolerance of fashionable humbug, to his determined preference for the necessarily less degenerate humanity of the fields. "I like," he would say, "to work upon unadulterated stuff. I like my human nature in the ore."

The real fact, however, blissfully ignored by both, was that their whole existence had, for fourteen years, circled round Helen as inevitably as that of a man round his natural home. Helen! In words even to each other it was, of course, *Madame la Duchesse*. In their hearts she was "Helen," their child, the light of their eyes!

The Canon took a fresh pinch and spilt the half of it in most unwonted slovenliness.

"But, surely, surely," he urged, with an attempt to re-establish himself upon his former height of happy, charitable security, and to argue down the clamorous voices of a thousand misgivings, "surely, my dear Doctor, you are frightening yourself — you are frightening me — rather unnecessarily. Granted that Joy is perhaps too attractive to young men, granted that it is not a very prudent thing for the Duchess to have burdened herself with an adopted child of that age (having so little knowledge of her previous life) more than this cannot be said. Her manner is perfectly modest. She seems an innocent, well-brought-up young person. Do you not think so? Have you observed anything forward, anything displeasing in her manner? As for me, she has struck me, I must say, as possessing quite remarkable reserve."

The Doctor, with his mouth open, his jaw thrust on one side, sat scratching his chin and rolling a deeply reflective eye upon the priest. There was a pause. Then the man of medicine let his hands fall with a clap upon his stout knees, shook his head and, stooping down, earnestly surveyed the patch of gravel between his feet.

"Too much reserve! That is the very thing. 'T is n't natural."

But the priest had already found consolation in his own arguments.

"It is the maidenly instinct, my good Doctor. Come, come! you see everything black this morning. Why, the Duchess is delighted. And has she not

had every opportunity of judging? She has the girl with her, morning, noon and night."

The Doctor threw back his head. "The Duchess?" he said. "Oh, don't use *that* as an argument, Canon! Why, she's as easy to take in as yourself: result of the long practice of charity, I suppose. Suspect no evil, eh? (Bless her! Bless her!) But she's not a clever woman."

The Canon was amazed. He was shocked. In his ears it sounded almost like blasphemy. Not clever? Not perfection? — their Helen!

"Monsieur Lebel!" he exclaimed.

"No, Monsieur de Hauteroche, I am not mad. I know what I am saying. Who wants her clever? Not I. Who wants her different? Not I. She's forty times better than the cleverest woman that ever breathed. She has got the intelligence of the heart, the tact of the heart. Ah, no one will ever beat her there! Look you, man: it is because she is what she is . . . well, we need not talk about that, you and I. But things would hit her hard, you know; and, in short, I don't like the look of it all up there."

"Why, then," said the priest, infectious fear again invading all his reasoning faculties, "the best thing that can happen is that this Mr. Dodd should marry Joy. From certain little indications," said the Canon, with an air of great worldly acumen, "obtuse as I may be, my old friend, I am convinced that this young American has the most serious intentions."

"Oh, yes," said the Doctor. "Yes, yes!" He lay back upon the bench, gazing upwards at the blue

sky with vacant eyes, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Why, then," pursued the priest, delighted, "Providence has already provided. They must be married. What more simple? The young girl's future is happily assured. And a possibly — ah — disturbing element is removed from the house. Mr. Dodd will have to return to America very soon. And there we are. And I myself — Hein! what did you say?"

"I said: 'Marry them,'" remarked the Doctor, still staring at the blue.

"Marry them?" repeated the other. "Of course."

"Marry them," said the Doctor, "if you can."

"Hein?" said the priest again.

M. Lebel gathered himself together. Fertile in methods of expressing the state of his mind by the contortions of his body, he now drew himself up into a sort of hard knot, his arms clasped round his knees.

"Oh, you might marry him, fast enough. But she won't have him." He suddenly unclasped himself and fell apart, both hands, fingers outstretched, flung out with the utmost emphasis. "She's shown that pretty plainly. She has her eye on some one else, Canon — the Duke!"

The Canon felt as if he were being whirled round in some sudden and amazing whirlwind: all his thoughts danced giddily, aimlessly, like dry leaves in an autumn blast.

"But," he exclaimed, feebly catching at the dry

leaf that bobbed up oftenest, "she cannot marry the Duke!"

There was a pause, an awful pause, while the Doctor looked at the priest. The Canon felt his skin grow cold and stiffen.

"No, she cannot marry the Duke," said the other at last, very slowly. Then he added quickly, with his expressive gesture: "Don't misunderstand me. Thus far all is right, of course. A week! But have not you noticed? The Duke avoids her, he is uncomfortable near her. He is afraid of her. Why? I told you why, just now: he is a man, *parbleu.* Afraid of her did I say? He is afraid of himself! And, what is more, the Duchess has noticed something unusual about him. She's asked me to catch him and prescribe for him to-day. She thinks him looking ill. She ought to have asked you — but we shall see."

"Oh!" cried the priest, and clasped his hands, "for God's sake, Doctor! Oh, my God!" He raised and shook his clasped hands. "This dreadful world! The Duke is a man of honour, Lebel — besides, he loves his wife. There is loyalty to keep him, the sanctity of hospitality. You see, I speak of no higher rule."

"The Duke is a man," said the Doctor, doggedly. "I don't know much about the higher rule, but I know men. So did the old chronicler, by-the-bye, whom you call inspired. Did Adam refuse the apple when Eve offered? Does any Adam ever refuse the apple from a pretty Eve? Ah, if he refuses once,

I warrant he does not refuse twice! Not if I know human nature."

"Alas, alas!" wailed the other. "Poor human nature! Poor indeed when it will depend on its own strength."

"Come," said the Doctor, with affected roughness, "this is no moment for jeremiads. I interrupted your meditations (ahem!) to-day because I felt the matter was urgent enough. By a stroke of good luck it appears that Monsieur Favereau is expected back. Our three good heads together should find a respectable way out of this business."

"Unfortunately," said the Canon, still heavily troubled, "there is a diocesan meeting at Versailles, this afternoon. Even now," said he after consulting his watch, "I ought to be thinking of making my way to the station. Impossible to say if I can return to-night or only in time for my mass to-morrow morning. It is most unfortunate!"

"Oh, to-morrow will be time enough, let us hope!" said the Doctor, with a laugh. "Time will be wanted — time and tact."

. . . . . .

"To vary the simile, in short," said M. Lebel, briskly, as he accompanied the Canon part of the way down the shady avenue of chestnuts towards the white high-road leading to the village, "to vary the simile, my old friend, there is a serpent in our paradise, and we must — and shall — get rid of the creature before it has time to do the mischief which is in its serpent nature to do!"

CHAPTER XXI

IT was very cool in the long drawing-room of the château, where groups of antique, gilt-legged, brocade-covered furniture made islands in a shining sea of parquet flooring. The walls, with the old pastels led into their white panels, stretched to an incredibly high ceiling, where dim chubby cupids wreathed in azure ribbons and pale roses chased one another across clouded blue skies.

Upon one of the little islands, protected from the outer world by a curveting gilt and glass screen, the Duchess and her friend, Madame Rodriguez, sat under the spreading fans of a palm. They were pleasantly installed between the reseda-scented breeze that blew in from one of the open windows and the incense rising from a fantastically large bowl of roses enthroned on a low marble and gilt-chained, altar-like tripod.

Helen, in her lilac-tinted morning gown, lying back against the pale green cushion of the *causeuse*, looked an image of rest and placidity — rest, although her long white fingers moved ceaselessly with flash of knitting-needle in the mass of wool in her lap; placidity, although one who knew her well might

have traced on her brow and in her eyes a secret weight of trouble.

Nessie, a very antithesis, sat on a spindle-legged chair at a spindle-legged writing-table — if indeed the verb "to sit" can apply to a kaleidoscopic change of position that never permitted a minute's quiescence in the same attitude. The little lady's apricot cheek was flushed; her crisp hair, twisted this way and that by the frequent clutch of impatient fingers, suggested an impression of mutiny unwonted in those well-drilled tresses.

Five or six sheets of paper, crumpled or torn across, lying around her, as well as ink-stains on the small fingers and even one or two upon the lace ruffles of that elaborate primrose-ribboned *negligée* — in which she had cut such a charming figure only an hour ago — bore witness that her agitation was connected with the inditing of a letter.

She now bent her head over the blotter. The much nibbled and ruffled goose-quill was plunged vindictively into the ink. Scratch, scratch went the nib in great black lines across the new sheet, with an energy that set every separate vaporous frill quivering.

Suddenly the pen was dashed aside and the writer wheeled round in her chair, waving the result of her labour.

"Listen, Helen —

"'Mrs. Nessie P. Rodriguez begs to inform Mr. Ruy Antonio Rodriguez that she declines to have any further communication with him of any kind or description whatever.

"'If Mr. Ruy Antonio Rodriguez goes on pestering Mrs. Nessie P. Rodriguez in the same manner as before, she will certainly place the matter in the hands of her lawyers.'

"What do you think of that? That's pretty clear, is it not?"

The Duchess turned the corner of her row without looking up. Then she said gently:

"I would not send that, Nessie."

Mrs. Nessie P. Rodriguez hereupon fell into a violent state of indignation, in which she fluttered and pecked about as effectively as a robin in a rage.

"Oh, would you not, though!" This was sarcastic. "No, of course you would not." This was sheer temper. "If your Duke played the same games on you as Rodriguez does on me, you would just turn up your eyes to heaven and pray for his soul." This was scathingly contemptuous. Then she became pathetic. "Oh, it's very easy for you to talk! I'd forgive the Duke anything myself; but when you have to deal with a real" (sob) "low-down sort of" (sob) "creature like Rodriguez——" Here her feelings became too deep for words.

Helen had raised her eyes. Her voice, after Nessie's vibrating nasal anger, fell like balm.

"He is your husband."

At this the human robin literally fluttered into the air. Down went the pen on one side, the sheet of paper on the other. The small feet stamped, the small fists gesticulated.

"And that's the very worst thing about the whole

sickening business. My husband! My husband! Lord, I could forgive him anything but that!"

She gave an angry laugh. And then — for the saving grace of real humour extends in many directions — futile rage fell away, and the comical side of her situation began to assert itself.

"Well, I am not built like you, Helen, and that's about it. I am just sick of being treated like an automatic machine for the delivery of banknotes. 'Pon my soul, that Rodriguez thinks he has only to drop a penny stamp in the slot, and out will come a cheque! It isn't even always a penny. I have known him do it on a halfpenny postcard. Faugh! No, now there isn't a mite of good in your going on like that, Helen. I have not got one spark of Christian feeling left for that man. No, nor I am not going to pray for his conversion. Why, we might meet again in the next world! And I don't think my halo would sit at all comfortably if I did not know he was having a real good frizzle somewhere else."

Her familiar cackle sounded quite heart-whole and refreshing. Helen smiled with indulgent, amused rebuke, as upon a kitten or a child or some other irresponsible but delightful little animal.

Madame Nessie picked up her pen, and nibbled it with her head on one side, restored to good humour by a just appreciation of her own wit.

A footman, in his pink-and-white striped morning-jacket, came round the screen and presented a telegram on a tray.

"For Madame," he said, holding it under Nessie's hand.

"Mercy!" said she, and eyed it with sidelong, shy glance. Then she snapped up the folded blue paper and watched the servant's retreating figure critically. "He's a well-trained young man, Helen. I wonder how long he stood at the door waiting for a pause in our conversation. I expect my voice carries some way."

"Jean is a good lad," said Helen, who took deep personal interest in every member of her household; "I do not think he would listen at the door. Your telegram, Nessie?"

Madame Rodriguez turned the bit of paper over and over.

"I don't like the look of it," she said childishly. Then she stuck her little finger under the wafer and pulled it open. The next minute, "Mercy!" she cried again, this time in shrill distress, and rose, hands rigidly stuck out, in a doll-like attitude of dismay.

"My dear!" exclaimed Helen, and anxiously approached her.

But the other impatiently shook off the kindly touch.

"I don't believe it," she muttered to herself. "It's a horrid lie." She crumpled the dispatch convulsively, the next moment smoothed it out again, re-read it with starting eyes and mouthing lips. Then with a scream of dismay, "Helen, Helen, what shall I do?" she cried, allowed the blue slip of paper to flutter from her hand, and sinking into her chair, rocked herself backwards and forwards.

Now really alarmed, her friend took up the telegram, and read for herself —

"Don Ruy Rodriguez dangerously ill — typhus. Begs you will not come — fear of infection. Send immediately four thousand francs for necessary expenses. Matter most urgent. I transmit his dying love. — MANUEL CORTEZ Y MENDOZA, *Grand Hotel Biarritz.*"

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned Nessie. "Read it out, Helen!" Listening, she punctuated each sentence with a short sharp groan. "What does he say it is now? Typhus!" She sat up. A flicker of doubt appeared in her distraught eye. She suddenly grew calmer. "Typhus. That's new. That's a new disease. He's never had typhus yet. What does typhus run to?"

The Duchess, who had assimilated the contents of the dispatch to her great relief (having sufficient knowledge of M. Rodriguez's previous history to feel very little anxiety on the score of his health news), and who was moved with no little indignation against one who could play so successfully upon a woman's tenderness, answered drily enough:

"Four thousand francs."

An agony of doubt distorted Nessie's countenance.

"That's cheap," she exclaimed, jumping to her feet once more. "Lord's sakes, perhaps it's true!" She clutched her friend's wrist and shook it violently. "Don't say it's true!" And, bursting into tears, she once again dropped on her chair.

. . . . . .

The crunch of the Doctor's heavy foot on the gravel resounded from outside. His sturdy bulk presently filled up the open window-space.

"Heyday," said the cheery voice, as its owner paused to look in, "what have we here?" He untidily stuffed the bandana handkerchief with which he was mopping his brown shining face into the side pocket of his alpaca jacket, and advanced, suddenly professional. The soles of his country-made boots squeaked on the polished boards. "Hysterics, eh?"

Madame Rodriguez had indeed become quite convulsive in her distress. The Doctor surveyed her with a somewhat callous eye. Then he turned to the Duchess, who was vainly endeavouring to administer consolation.

"Leave her alone, Madame," he said. "It is the very worst thing in the world to fuss about an hysterical patient. Now, my treatment is to pour cold water gently down the neck, and then to leave the afflicted person quite alone, in a thorough draught if possible. I have never known it fail. Allow me to ring for some cold water."

Not regarding the situation as serious, and amused by the sudden listening tension that had come over Nessie's figure as well as by M. Lebel's quizzical expression, even tender-hearted Helen was unable to refrain from laughter.

"Hush, Doctor," she murmured, trying in vain to keep the note of mirth from her voice, "she has had bad news."

Madame Rodriguez sprang to her feet, indignation for the nonce over-riding all other emotions.

"Doctor," she exclaimed, "you are a perfect brute! Helen! how dare you laugh?" She settled her ruffled feathers and assumed an air of great dignity. "I am going to pack my trunks, anyhow, and take the first rail to nurse my dying husband!"

"Wait, Nessie, wait!" urged the Duchess, and stretched out a detaining hand. "Oh, truly, darling, I am not heartless, but — the fact is, I don't quite believe in that telegram."

Nessie folded her arms. "How dare you, Helen?"

"May one see, Madame?" interposed the Doctor. And, without waiting for further permission, he took up the dispatch.

"You know, Nessie," went on Helen, eye and tone pleading pardon for the merriment that still shook her — "you know last week it was influenza, and that was fifteen thousand francs."

"Oh, you have made us all aware of the gentleman's ways," said the Doctor. Then, with his great laugh, tapping the bit of paper, he added: "And I am afraid — for your sake, I am afraid — there is not a shred of truth in this."

But Nessie, for no reason that can be assigned, was determined to view matters on the tragic side.

"Oh!" she cried, with a sharp ejaculation that was like the pop of a champagne cork. She shook herself free of the Duchess. "I'm going to pack, anyhow."

The Doctor was as resourceful by long habit as he was good-natured by disposition.

"Ah, well — hold! It is easy to ascertain the truth without putting one's self out so much. Look here, now, there 's an old colleague of mine at Biarritz; I 'll telegraph to him this very moment. With precedence we 'll have the answer in an hour."

"There, Nessie, what a good idea!" cried Helen.

But Nessie had stalked majestically to the door. Even as the Doctor sat down to write she halted and looked back at them, a being destined so completely by nature for the light side of existence that all her efforts at tragic indignation and wifely concern only succeeded in making her somehow more comical than in her gayest moments. Shrilly, solemnly and warningly she called out to her friend across the long room — Titania playing at Cassandra:

"May you never feel what it is not to know whether you 're going to be a widow or not!"

The Doctor laughed out loud, as his stylographic pen fled along the telegram form. But Helen's face changed.

"What a horrible thing to say!" she murmured slowly, as if to herself.

"Just ring the bell, will you, Madame?" said the Doctor.

Helen was neither nervous nor morbid. The very sound of the Doctor's matter-of-fact voice was sufficient to dispel her momentary inexplicable feeling of impending calamity.

Brushing away the mental cloud, she did as the Doctor bade her and stood smiling whilst, in his characteristic way, he gave directions to the footman.

"Here, Joseph — no, by the way, you 're John, you are, well, it does not matter anyway — take this to the chemist — I mean to the post-office — to be made up. Tut, tut! I mean, forwarded at once, with precedence, understand?"

As the door closed on the servant, Lebel wheeled round his chair, clapped his hands on his knees and drew the long breath which generally preceded his entry into professional matters.

"Well," said he, "here I am. Where is my patient? Where is the Duke?"

"He will be here in a minute. He said he would ride to Versailles and be back for luncheon." She clasped her fingers over her knitting and glanced up at the friendly face. "I am anxious," she went on.

"Oh, pooh!" said the Doctor.

"No, indeed, Doctor, he is not well; I have never seen him like this before. Of course he does not complain; he won't even admit that he is ill. But he does not eat, he does not sleep. He is restless. He walks and walks, and rides and rides, as if to shake off something — I don't know what — something that seems to be coming over him."

"Eh, eh," said the man of medicine, reflectively, with his chin on one side and his fingers burrowing in beard stubble. "Temper short? Irritable?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "He has never been tenderer to me, never sweeter in his courtesy to every one around him. He laughs, he talks; but there is a sad look on his face, Doctor, when he does not know that I am watching."

"Ah!" commented M. Lebel, and the wandering fingers reached his ear where they halted, pensively pulling.

"I am afraid," Helen pursued, "sometimes, that he may be feeling some illness coming upon him; that he is trying to fight against it, to keep it from me. His first thought is always for me." Something in the Doctor's attitude struck her as alarming. Instantly every fibre of her being thrilled to terror. "Doctor, you don't think —— Oh, my God, is he really going to be ill?"

"Ill? Not he," said the Doctor. "There now, there you go! Nothing, I'll warrant, that you and I cannot cure. Eh, a splendid constitution, famous type, Madame, famous type! Does n't give us doctors much work, nor ever will either." He patted her white fingers with his kind, ugly hand. "I'll have a look at him, since you wish it. But he must n't know. Leave it to me." He stood up, legs wide apart, in his favourite attitude. "Liver," said he. "The liver, Madame — it is a prosaic subject, but even our Duke has a liver, I am glad to say — the liver can play the devil with a man sometimes; excuse the word."

The wife's ear was now strained to other sounds than the Doctor's laugh, reassuring as it was. She had caught the footfall of a tired horse under the avenue trees.

"There is Cluny!" she cried.

CHAPTER XXII

"ALL said and done, there is no denying it," the Doctor had to admit to himself, as Cluny came in, "that is a charming fellow."

A moment before, drawing up a rapid diagnosis based on his own observations and the Duchess's confidences, he had come to rather uncomplimentary and alarming conclusions:

A poor weak man! The little white witch has brought him to the point of mental conflict already. Sapristi, it was time indeed to interfere! Eh! and he married to that woman! Ah, God, the pitiful race!

But the entrance of the Duke, the mere fact of his handsome and courteous presence, the smile and the genuinely cordial greeting produced their wonted effect. That the man could smile so kindly when he was so unmistakably weary, both in mind and body, at once placed him in the rank of those whose errors elicit pity and not condemnation.

It did not, however, take the discriminating Doctor's eye many seconds to discover that things were more wrong with the Duke than even he had anticipated. And while, with an assumption of more than usual boisterousness, M. Lebel returned his

patron's salutation, his glance running over the unconscious patient's face and figure, took note of small significant details: the dilated pupil, the beaded brow, the notable emaciation of the hands, the restless foot, the quick look from side to side, as if in apprehension of something or some one.

"Decidedly," thought M. Lebel again, "it was high time!"

"Ah," said Cluny, sinking into a chair, with a deep sigh, "how cool and restful it is here!" He looked at his wife wistfully, and then sharply away again, as if the sight of her face stung him.

"Well, you are pretty hot, I should say," said the Doctor, balancing his round bulk on the edge of the *causeuse*. "It looks as if you were going in for banting all of a sudden. Such athleticism! Always on the move! Aha! I begin to suspect it 's all on account of the American cousin. Want to show what a sportsman a Frenchman can be, eh?"

He slid his squat fingers upon the Duke's wrist. Cluny made an impatient movement to shake off the touch. But Dr. Lebel gripped, looking hard at him. And with a faint smile and shrug the Duke submitted.

There was half a minute's pause. Helen, with parted lips and anxious face, watched the Doctor's countenance, now set into gravity. He looked up suddenly and with determination smiled at her.

"Bravo!" he cried, dropping the patient's hand. "I always said you had the best constitution in the province."

But "*diable, diable!*" was what he was crying to himself; "*hard as wire, and as jerky as a telegraph needle!*"

"What, I?" said the Duke, rising. "Oh, I 'm as strong as a horse!"

He strolled over to the window and stood a moment looking out. Dr. Lebel rolled off his seat and followed him.

"Don't overdo the exercise though," he insisted. "You 've grown thinner."

. . . . . .

Beneath them the garden sloped down to the chestnut alley. The last bloom of roses starred hedge and standard. The scent of the reseda and of the late honey-suckle was very sweet in the sunshine. From a hidden sward came the whirr of a mowing-machine; somewhere out of sight rose the song of a fountain: it was all very peaceful and homelike. The sky was very blue; the green and the flowers were very beautiful; the air very still. This garden Cluny had loved to call his paradise, but deep to-day was the melancholy sweeping in upon his soul as he gazed down upon it.

All at once, after a rigid second that marked the checking of a shudder, he turned abruptly away: a white straw hat and the flutter of a white dress had appeared among the rose bushes.

"Ah," said the Doctor, quietly, "there goes Mademoiselle!"

Helen came up, linked her arm into her husband's, and drew him again to the window. The figure

of Joy, busily engaged among the flowers with garden scissors and basket, now moved distinctly into view.

"The dear child," said Helen; "look at her! Is n't she pretty?"

The Doctor's words and smile had almost reassured her on Cluny's account. She had recovered something of her radiance.

"I wonder," she went on, "how I ever managed to live without a daughter. See how she settled those roses for me," pointing to the great silver bowl. "A fairy could not have done it better. I find her, you must know, taking things off my hands in the most natural, unobtrusive way in all the world. I call her 'my delicate Ariel.' (I know you have read Shakespere, Doctor). And then her tact, her good taste! Always the same pretty modesty. She is shy, of course, but only as a baby princess might be. Don't you think so, Cluny? Ah, you must agree with me there, at least! There is a little want of enthusiasm towards my daughter," she explained, turning again to the Doctor, "in this good, spoiling husband of mine. But even he could not say that she has ever uttered a word, given a look that one would wish ungiven, unsaid."

The Duke, after an imperceptible hesitation, patted his wife's hand.

In his soul just now an infinite weariness had superseded all sense of the bitterness and irony of facts.

"No, dear," he answered with extreme gentleness

"I foresaw such weeks, such months even, of drilling for my little recruit," continued Helen, gaily, her eye still resting on the rose gatherer; "such endless litanies of hints, such moments of ludicrous agony for both of us. Vain fears! She has adapted herself like — like a flower."

With swinging step a tall figure now crossed the brilliant sward and plunged down the narrow precipitous path between the clipped fantastic box-hedges. Helen drew back, and in the action separated herself from Cluny.

"Ah," said she, with a smile and a sigh, "there goes George! I half expected that. There are others who want my sprite, it seems."

Cluny stood a moment looking fixedly out, with eyes not seeing the radiant vision but intent upon some inward spectacle of conflict. Then he turned abruptly on his heel and moved towards the door without a word.

Half-way down the room, however, he halted and spoke.

"I must go and change these dusty things, dear. *A tantôt.*"

He was looking horribly tired, the Doctor thought, (under their bushy brows Lebel's sharp eye had not lost a shade of his patient's face) and the look and tone with which he now addressed his wife struck him painfully. "One might almost think it was remorse," he pondered.

"Oh," came the Duchess's voice, as the door closed and they were again alone, "how happy you

have made me!" She laid her white hand upon his arm. "You don't think, then, he is really ill?"

"Decidedly," thought the Doctor, "the woman's unobservant, not to say dense. . . . God forgive me! Come, come, Sebastian, my friend, it's time for you to step in."

"Ill?" he said aloud. "No, he has got no disease that I know of. But he is nervous. He is very nervous, Madame."

"What do you mean?" cried she, and her finger tightened on his shiny sleeve.

The Doctor looked full into her face with his true, benevolent gaze.

"Now, look here," said he, "this is not a case for me: it's a case for you. The Duke is worried. How can I tell what has worried him? Something has got on his nerves. *Saperlipopette!* A very little thing will sometimes get on a man's nerves. The great Englishman, Carlyle, he could not stand cocks; and I, as you see me, I can't stand the smell of incense. Hey, hey, a little voyage would do him a world of good — a voyage with you, I mean. Take him off with you as soon as possible — just you two alone together, you understand — a little honeymoon trip, *en partie fine.* And at the end of the first week (if you are the woman I think you are) you 'll have found out what is the little something that has got so desperately on his nerves. And you will see to its being removed from his existence, once for all."

Helen let her hand drop. She had grown pale;

her eyes had become dilated; the corners of her mouth had fallen like that of a puzzled, troubled child.

"But, Doctor," she said — "but Doctor!" Something intangible, disturbing, alarming, seemed to have come into her sheltered and serene existence. It had no shape as yet, it was utterly and horribly unknown; she could give it no name, but she dimly felt its presence.

"Well," insisted the Doctor, "is it not a nice prescription? Ask your husband and see what he says. A new honeymoon, aha!"

His laugh echoed in the still, lofty room. He reached for his battered hat, waved it at the Duchess, and plunged out of the open window-door. In a second he was back again, looking in upon her.

"*Partie fine*, remember!" he cried with warning finger emphasising. "No aunts, no cousins, no adopted daughters — no adopted daughters!"

His trot was heard crunching away on the gravel. Helen stood motionless; she felt as if she were in a dream.

"*No adopted daughters*," she repeated, half unconsciously. And the menacing, formless terror seemed suddenly to grow darker and more distinct. Why? She did not know!

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was perhaps not a happier man in the world that gorgeous October forenoon than George Dodd, as he cut across the sunlit green and dived down the little dark cool path on his way to the rose-garden below.

From his window he had spied the white straw hat and the white fluttering skirt, and the opportunity he had vainly sought during the last two days he now believed was given into his hands under the most favourable conditions. The unsophisticated nature of this man was full of inarticulate poetry: the perfect day, the blue sky and the sunshine, the perfume and the colour of the world seemed to express for him something of the new beauty which, with his manhood's new dream of love, had lately come into his life.

Love (we have so often been told that it has become a platitude) is blind. But is this true? Is it not rather that, seeing through love's eyes we see all transfigured, all coloured with love's own light; that we see life as a place of happiness, youth as unendingly beautiful, hardships as matters of no moment, humanity as kind, faith as enduring? A

state of affairs, the cynic might say, far more dangerous than blindness. Yet, perhaps, if ever we reach another world where (as we are told also) love only rules, we may find that it was a true vision, after all, of what might have been below, of what can be hereafter.

But, alas, that the bliss of paradise in this still incomplete world should be so shy a thing! Adam's bliss was put to flight for the plucking of an apple: Mr. Dodd's was quite shaken by the mere sight of a second straw hat in the rose-garden. This was a hard structure of English pattern, encircled by the flaring colours of the last automobile club. It was reposing at the very back of the Marquis Totol's nut-like head, whereon, in consideration of the recent wave of heat, the hair had been cut so close that it presented a pale mouse-like surface. And Totol's originality of countenance was vastly heightened thereby.

Squatting upon the grass, with his toes in the sunshine, well screened from any observation (defiladed, as the military engineer would have it) from the highest windows, the eternal cigarette between his lips, his knuckly hands clasped round his knees, the Marquis de Lormes was to all appearances enjoying himself to his utmost capacity.

Even as his brother rounded the corner and stood glaring at the hat, a shrill cachinnation rent the air. Totol, with a wriggle of exceeding amusement, was waggling his long patent leather shoes; and, rubbing his hands up and down his shins, displayed

lengths of pink and white circularly striped sock, well tightened upon legs at which any decently built skeleton might have jeered. And to the utter rout of all the American's paradisiacal sensations for the moment, a silver tinkle of laughter came to join the inane and offensive cackle.

Joy was laughing! A basket of roses upon one arm, as she paused in the act of clipping a great *La France* bloom from a standard tree, blushing and dimpling under a broad-brimmed hat, she made as pretty a picture as a man's eyes could wish to rest upon. And Dodd's heart contracted with that unreasonable jealousy of the uncertain lover which includes in its distrust greybeards as well as schoolboys, the most innocent as well as the most ineligible of possible rivals. But if Joy did not regard Totol's presence with disfavour, neither did she show aversion towards the new arrival. On the contrary, although she checked her laughter with one of her quaint movements of secretiveness, the smile of greeting and the dimple beside it were not to be suppressed.

Totol, however, with the peculiar candour of his class, openly gave vent to displeasure.

"Go away do, George, there 's a good fellow! Mademoiselle and I had just found a nice little corner by ourselves. Scat! Is n't that American for *fiches moi le camp?* Or is it: 'get'? Then: Get, my dear!"

"My dear is not American," said the girl, softly.

She flung as she spoke a glance at the sailor which

so distinctly invited him not to "get" that half his irritation vanished on the spot. Never before had he seen her so deliciously emancipated from her conventional French reserve. He came close up to her. She seemed the centre of an atmosphere of rose scent, of rose bloom.

"Allow me," said he, placing his large hand over the little fingers and the heavy garden-scissors. "Only tell me which you want to have cut."

She slipped her hand daintily from his touch.

"That 's American all over," growled Totol. "We were just as happy as Philippinos before you must thrust your interfering hulk into our little nook. Is n't that so, Miss Joy? She was amusing me so nicely. I was amusing her so nicely. And if you think *you* are a pretty object to watch snapping roses — well, that 's where you are deceived, my dear."

Joy tittered faintly, and George Dodd perceived for the first time a pink rose-bud hanging from the button-hole of the Marquis's tennis coat. He had always, and justly, known himself as a level-headed, even-tempered fellow: thus the sudden gust of fury that came over him was even more surprising to himself than to his companions. He stuck the garden-scissors into the earth with a vicious chuck and turned upon his relative.

"Look here," said he, in a vibrating voice, "if it comes to getting, I know who 's to get!" He advanced two steps and flung a look of furious contempt upon the squatting figure. "You — you little frog!" said he.

Totol instantly took two or three leaps over the greensward in imitation of the batrachian just mentioned, until he had reached a position of safety behind Joy's skirts, where, peeping round, he unreservedly gave vent to an ecstasy of mirth over the big brother's baffled countenance.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, I am so frightened!" he gibbered.

"And that," cried Dodd, with an unconsciously dramatic gesture of scorn — "that is my brother! Well, they talk of a man and a brother — a monkey and a brother . . . !"

Joy laughed aloud.

The Marquis had withdrawn his head into shelter. Presently he lifted his voice in plaintive tone.

"A monkey now! Why, then, I reckon, brother, you mean to say a kind of tree-frog."

He shot out his head to see the effect of this observation. Once more feigning to be overcome with terror, he shot it in again, chattering his teeth, rolling his eyes and shivering violently.

George Dodd, whose patience was at lowest ebb, lost the last of it as the little man now clutched at Joy's skirt with his long thin hands. In two strides the sailor was upon the Marquis. In as many seconds the latter was lifted from the ground in a vicelike double clutch and deposited on the other side of the box hedge — not brutally, but with all the firmness required to carry conviction.

Totol landed on his knees and hands, promptly turned over to a sitting posture and stared up with-

out the least resentment at his brother's inflexible bronze face.

"Oh, I say," he drawled, in his most pronounced English; then, grimacing, began to rub his hands and knees.

"You had better get up, young man," said George, gravely. Then, overcome by sudden remorse at his own violence before a woman, he hastily returned to Joy. "I 'm afraid I must have frightened you," he said with the extraordinary gentleness of the strong man. "I humbly beg your pardon."

He glanced under the shadow of the hat to look at the girl's averted face: it was pink with suppressed laughter, dimpling all over. She shot one of her quick looks at him; their faces were very close, the sparkle of her eyes seemed to dazzle him.

In the sailor's scheme of existence true women were timid, shrinking creatures, to be sheltered by true men from all ugly contacts. He was as much puzzled now by her enjoyment of the situation as he had been a moment before by her toleration of his brother's familiarity. But he had reached that state of love where the most contradictory things are as fuel to the flame. A week ago her attitude might have made him hesitate, reflect; now the very mystery of her personality served to increase the fascination. And that look in her eyes verily intoxicated him.

"Will you not give me a rose too?" he whispered in her ear. Belonging, as it has been said, to the simple old school, this was obviously the natural preliminary to the good old-fashioned proposal.

His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer. The girl drew back from this close presence and picked up her basket and her scissors, replacing the fallen blooms with cool hands that were perfectly steady and precise in their movements. When she turned towards the waiting lover, she was once again the demure, self-controlled maiden of the first hour of their acquaintance.

"If you please," said she, with downcast eyes, "what were you saying?"

Her manœuvres at once baffled, irritated, and drew him on. Whereas, in theory, he was giving this girl the ideal chivalrous devotion of the high-souled man for the woman of his choice, in practice, he was merely loving her with the elemental instinctive passion of the uncivilised man for the mate he would if necessary capture with bow and spear.

"Joy," he began, almost fiercely. A cackle rang out behind him. He turned as savagely as his Saxon ancestor might have turned on the hunter that dared cross his chase. But the absurdity of the mere sight of Totol's grin promptly disposed of any earnestness in the situation. What is there in this life of beautiful, of solemn, of tragic, that ridicule will not kill? George Dodd felt that to allow that irresponsible being a glimpse of his own strong heart's working would be not only desecration, but positive indecency. All heat and anger died out of his handsome face. A good-humouredly contemptuous smile came back to his lips.

"Are we not, then, ever to be rid of you?" cried

he; turned back, to include the girl in his words, and found that she had vanished.

"He-he-he!" commented the Marquis, who scrambled back with a good deal of difficulty over the hedge, and then, squatting on the sward again in his favourite attitude, began to address his elder in the tone of the man of the world explaining the nature of things to the backwoodsman.

"Believe me, little brother," he said judicially, "you 're quite off the spot. Oh, I thought I should have died of laughter when I heard you asking the little girl for a rose! Your tone and your attitude, 1830 style all over! (Great God," continued M. de Lormes, in a paradoxical aside, "how it does bore me, how it has always bored me, the 1830 style! The poor papa was of that period. The mamma less. Rigid, if you will, but not romantic, thank Heaven!")

The sailor folded his arms. He had quite made up his mind that he would now have to compass another opportunity for himself, Totol's intervention having successfully spoilt the situation.

"Better let the little idiot," he thought, "have his fooling out, and then, perhaps, he 'll give us a day off."

"Go on," he went on aloud, encouragingly. "It 's very enlightening to hear you discourse."

"You see, my lieutenant," pursued Totol, "you may come from the New World and all that sort of thing, but you are old-fashioned: *vieux jeu*, my friend, *vieux jeu en diable!* Your game is played out.

Now, the modern woman does not know what to do with your kind. She has no use for the likes of you (as I think they say over the water). The puzzle to me is," said the Marquis, drawing up his face into a thousand wrinkles with his wise, pathetic monkey-look, "how, at this time of day, you come to be what you are; for, judging by one or two little specimens I have seen, you can raise women over there that ought to teach you a thing or two!"

He paused with a grimace, as if endeavouring to crack the problem between his back teeth.

"Well," said the American, "I don't exactly know what our women have taught me, but I just do know that it is a sort of custom with us men out there to give a good lesson to the idiot that does not know how to treat a lady with respect."

"Respect," echoed Totol, with supreme contempt. "My good George, that 's exactly where you make such a mistake. We have not time, we moderns, men or women, to bother our heads about respect. These are motor-car days, my poor innocent! A pretty object," he chuckled, "I should look if I were to go in for respect! My faith, they 'd laugh in my face! No, no, believe me, if you want to flirt in your manner, to play the comedy over the gift of a rose and all that, look out for one of your own style. Don't fix upon that little red-mouthed witch yonder: for she 's modern, I tell you, modern down to the edge of her little pink nails. As up-to-date as I am."

Feeling that the force of asseveration could go no further, Totol paused and smiled.

Mr. Dodd grew a little rigid about the lips, a little pale about the nostrils.

"Indeed?" he said sarcastically. Had he been told he was in a boiling rage he would sternly have denied the fact.

"I speak of Mademoiselle as a woman, you may have observed," Totol resumed, more and more charmed with his dialectic. "I abhor young girls, I loathe young girls. They revolt me. That little one may seem to you a young girl: that 's all you know about it. It 's a mere accident of circumstances. In reality she 's a woman, modern woman, and that 's why we understand each other. He, he! Did n't I get my rose? Boned one out of her basket! Eh! Took a red one first. And says she: 'This one is prettier, Monsieur,' and holds me out the pink one. Ah, the little motor-car! No time to stop for phrases. Do you think she 'd ever take on with a good old slow-coach like you? The little spick-and-span machine! On with you! On with you! Whizz! B-r-r-r! so long as it 's amusing! That 's the way with her. As for the great passion? '*Oh zut!* Apply elsewhere. Ta-ta!' *Allons. J'ai dit.* Digest all this, and may it profit you, young man!"

Here the Marquis made a dive for his straw hat, which in the previous scuffle had rolled close to the hedge. Beating it against his elbow he nodded two or three times good-naturedly at his brother and began to take his jerky way towards the house.

"Well, of all the confounded little grasshoppers!"

ejaculated George Dodd, as, with a kick, the last flash of patent leather shoe disappeared round the clipped bushes. "What can have kept me from just nipping him in two to put a stop to his infernal chirp, I wonder? Funny thing now, she should have given him that rose!" When it came to analysis that seemed to be the one seriously annoying incident of the morning. "I suppose," further reflected the lover, with the natural effort to restore the equilibrium of hope, "I suppose she's like me. She doesn't think such a goggle-eyed shrimp of much account. Well, I'll have it out with her this afternoon, anyway."

CHAPTER XXIV

HELEN'S naturally healthy mind had not yet had time to shake off the unwonted morbid foreboding left by the Doctor's words when M. Favereau walked into the room. Accustomed as he was to Helen's welcome, never had he seen joy flash more unmistakably into her face at sight of him. Yet it was the joy of hope, of relief: and Favereau's anxious heart contracted. He had noted her pensive attitude as he came in; nor did his quick eye fail to read something upon her face, all smilingly as it was now turned to him, that had never been there before: a look of trouble. So, the shadow of the unnameable horror had fallen upon her already!

Her greeting confirmed his surmises. They clasped hands.

"My dear Favereau," she cried, "I have never wanted you more!"

"Oh," said he, "that odious Exhibition! I have been chained like a dog to it! But is anything wrong — Cluny?"

Conscious that he spoke in tones which betrayed his previous anxiety, he endeavoured to cover his flurry by a laugh. She, in her unobservant way, perceived nothing unusual.

"Ah, you always make fun of me for my anxiety about Cluny!" she said earnestly. "I am afraid I shall always be as bad as a mother over her first baby." She smiled with the wistful look that any reference to her disappointed motherhood always brought into her eyes. "You will laugh at me now, of course."

"Oh, no doubt," said Favereau, entering with some success into the *rôle* she assigned to him. "Go on, my dear. What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened," said Helen. She hesitated, tried to smile still, though her lips quivered. To formulate her trouble seemed somehow to lend it reality. "I don't think Cluny is like himself since you left us. He looks ill, though Lebel says he is not ill really." Then she added with an effort, the pain of which was written in her face: "Favereau, Lebel thinks that something has got on Cluny's nerves."

She had laid her hand, in her earnestness, upon her old friend's breast. He knew by the way she gently beat it that there were tears rising which she would not allow to flow. The corners of her mouth drooped. He remembered that action and that piteous look from the days of her childhood.

"My God," he thought, his mind reverting ever to the central emotion of his life, "would it not have been better if she had never known such love as this! Humanity is too frail for it. Alas!" he groaned in his heart, "what would it be if she knew!"

He laid his hand protectingly over hers: "Nerves, my dear, are not a speciality of your sex. A poor man may have his nerves too; and it 's astonishing how much disturbance a seemingly very small thing will cause if it happens to get 'on them.'"

The voice and touch seemed instantly to reduce Helen's troubles to mere shadows.

"Why, that 's very much what the Doctor says!" she exclaimed with renewed brightness. "What a wise old thing you are! But what can it be, I wonder, that Cluny would not tell me?"

Favereau drew all his beard into one hand and twisted it.

"I wonder," said he.

"Oh, Favereau, think, think, help me! It is most important. You know we must remove it, whatever it be, at once."

Favereau sat down, clasped his hands loosely between his knees and reflected — reflected as deeply as ever he had done in his life. Then he made up his mind.

"Well," said he — "this is the merest supposition, of course — but don't you think that you make life a little hard for Cluny?"

"Favereau!"

"A man who loves his wife," pursued he, unmoved, "occasionally appreciates being quite alone with her. For some reason or another — very excellent reasons no doubt — you never seem to give Edward that treat."

She was struck to the heart, struck with a keen

remorse, at the same time with a keener joy. "*Take him away, by himself, you two alone.*" The Doctor had guessed it too! And did Cluny love her still so foolishly, so sweetly? She could not speak. She shot an eager look at Favereau and then cast her eyes down; and the lovely crimson of her woman's blush dyed her face, while the old radiant aureole seemed to leap back to crown her.

The man cast down his eyes too, for very shame of his own diplomacy in presence of this single-mindedness.

After a short pause he resumed doggedly: "What I mean, Helen, is this: between convalescent artists, delicate priests, aunts and cousins, American and otherwise, unhappily married school-companions, not to speak of certain prosy old individuals like myself, Edward has very seldom been allowed to have you to himself at any time. And now" — he raised his eyes and looked at her steadily while he spoke with deliberate emphasis — "there seems to be very little prospect of his ever being able to do so in the future . . . at least, so long as you have this adopted daughter about you."

"*What was it the Doctor had said: 'Above all, no adopted daughters!'*"

"Stop!" cried Helen, aloud, putting out her hand. "Yes, yes, you are right; you are both right. How was it I could have been so blind? Yes, I felt there was something, something between us, and it was — the child! My poor love! He never said one word to me against the project. But from the

moment of her arrival he avoided her. Oh, I understand now! I thought it strange that he should never address her voluntarily, never change his cold ceremonious manner towards her."

She paused, and it was evident that she could spare no thought to the complication yet. Her mind was luxuriating in the exquisiteness of her discovery. Her lips parted into a smile, half motherly, half bride-like.

"My Cluny!" she murmured, half to herself. "And so he is jealous!"

After a while Favereau spoke again. "Cluny," he said, "is not above all the weaknesses of mankind, Helen."

His voice rang with a sort of warning sadness which, far as it was from being directed against her, brought Helen very swiftly back to a sense of her own shortcoming.

"I have done wrong," she exclaimed. "How could I have let anything come between me and Cluny!" A second after, however, she cried again, unconsciously drawn back to the sweetness of the thought. "Jealous! My poor darling, jealous! I must go to him."

Favereau caught her gently by the arm as she turned impulsively to leave the room.

"My dear child," said he, anxiously, "what do you mean to do?"

She opened her mouth to speak, then hesitated.

"Edward is a man," Favereau went on, "as you know better than I, of curious fastidiousness of

mind. If you let him think we have all been discussing his low spirits ——"

Helen flushed, this time painfully. "I do nothing but stupid things," she said. "Help me, Favereau. Lebel wants me to go right away with Cluny, just we two. What say you?"

Favereau's whole countenance became illumined. "Capital!" he cried. "Nothing could be better."

"So the Doctor knows," he thought. "Well, I am glad, I think. I would like to have his advice."

CHAPTER XXV

MADAME DE LORMES opened the door and stood for a moment looking sternly down the length of the room, dim to her eyes after the brightness of the terrace.

Catching sight of the two figures by the window, she bore down upon them like a ship in full sail, blown upon the wind of her indignation, her silk skirts ballooning as she came.

"Helen," she exclaimed, with the barest acknowledgment of Favereau's salute, "where is Anatole? I insist upon knowing where Anatole is?"

"My dear Aunt," said Helen, with an hesitation not unmixed with some amusement, "I really cannot say. I thought he went to the garden."

"To the garden!" echoed the Marquise, in her gravest bassoon note. "Alone, Helen?"

"I don't know, Aunt."

"I have looked for him from my windows, from the corridor windows, from the balcony and from the terrace," recited the anxious mother, her voice rising a little into plaintiveness, only to fall again into tragedy. "It was in vain. His bicycle is in the hall. And the motor, I ascertained, is in the coach-house. Anatole never walks, and never

rides. Ah" — she looked out of the window — "what do I see?"

Her fat fingers trembled as she raised her eye-glass.

Had the good lady stood on that point of vantage but a few moments before she would have beheld the edifying spectacle of the present representative of the house of Lormes, *chef du nom et des armes* as aforesaid, performing unusual and obligatory gymnastic exercise over box-wood hedges.

"That girl!" said Madame de Lormes in her voice of doom, as she caught sight of Joy's white hat.

"But not," said Favereau in mockingly soothing tones, "not with the Marquis. Be tranquillised, Madame. That is only Captain Dodd."

Madame de Lormes drew a quick breath of relief and dropped her eye-glass. But almost immediately she raised it again and scrutinised the unconscious pair below with renewed severity. Then she turned upon her niece.

"I hope you realise what you are doing, Helen," she said, "in throwing my sons, one after the other, into the company of that sly, intriguing schoolgirl."

She turned and swept out of the room, unheeding Helen's indignant protest. Favereau looked philosophically after the floating violet silks.

"There goes another," he remarked, "who does not share your enthusiasm for Mademoiselle."

Helen laughed a little angrily. "Poor Aunt!" she said. "Who would think what a good heart she

hides under all these absurd prejudices?" Her eyes wandered back to the rose garden. Presently her face lit up once more. "And yet," she said, "yonder is the probable solution of the whole problem. Look down upon them, old friend. It is a pretty sight."

At that moment, in his disturbed paradise below, George Dodd was pleading for a rose. Favereau, as he was bid, gazed earnestly upon the two for a second; then instinctively both he and Helen withdrew. Eagerly smiling, she sought his sympathy and approval. But the man was too deeply engaged in examining the idea to be able to pronounce upon it.

"Do you really mean ——" he began at last, blankly.

Helen nodded. "I have seen it coming," she said, "from the very first day; and I did not like it at all, as you may guess. But now, oh, I don't know! I suppose I ought to be glad, after what you all tell me. I am afraid," she added after a pause, "that my aunt will be furious. But all things considered, my adopted daughter need be no bad match for any one."

Favereau was still lost in conflict with the thought.

"What a solution!" he was saying to himself. "And to think I too saw it coming that first day! Yet, so long as it saves Helen — so long as it saves her!"

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was not till after luncheon that Favereau was able to see Cluny by himself. But during the meal he had sufficient opportunity to study the alteration in his friend's appearance — to mark unmistakable symptoms of severe nervous tension in his alternations of feverish, voluble gaiety and fits of abstraction.

No sooner were they alone than the Duke, with his back to the door and a single despairing gesture of both hands, burst forth in a sort of fury:

"You might have come sooner. How could you leave me alone in this hell — in this hell! So long. A whole week!"

The gesture and the tone were so unlike all he had ever seen of the man that Favereau, with a new terror at his heart, caught the poor out-flung, ice-cold wrists in his warm grasp and scrutinised the pallid face, aged it seemed at that moment by as many years as there were days since they had last met. But the eyes that returned his look were sane enough — too sane, perhaps, indeed, in their depth of misery. Whatever he still nourished of resentment against, of contempt for Helen's husband van-

ished then for ever from the elder man's mind to be replaced by pity, by something almost akin to respect. He had never given Cluny credit for such depth of feeling. This remorse was almost great enough to balance the sin.

Still maintaining his hold he led the Duke to his usual chair and impelled him into it. Then he took a seat himself behind him and said, with deep sympathy:

"Are things then so bad?"

The quiet of his companion's manner, the knowledge of his strength, the relief of being able here at last to throw off the strain of his horrible *rôle*, went a long way towards restoring Cluny's self-control. It was calmly enough, therefore, if hopelessly, that he answered:

"Bad? It is unendurable!" Then, his voice swelling like a tragic organ note: "My fair home," he went on, "has been turned into a hell, horrible beyond the power of description. And I made it myself!"

"Alas!" said Favereau, with sad philosophy, "that is the very essence of hell. In the most appalling catastrophe that can be conceived there would always be one touch wanting to its complete hideousness if we had not brought it about ourselves. That is the touch that makes — hell."

Cluny gave a sigh that only utter weariness prevented from being a groan. And Favereau, with a rapid change of manner, laid his hand again on his arm, and said in a tone of benevolent practicality:

"Well, well, my poor boy, now tell me all about it; and let us see what can be done."

A piteous light of hope gleamed again in Cluny's eyes. He was glad, too, to ease his heart of its accumulated burden to the one being on earth who knew him as he was.

"Believe me," he began, "others have never yet seen me like this. I never failed for a second upon the road I elected to take. Ah, Favereau!" — he interrupted himself with a ghost of his old boyish way — "you were right, as usual; I chose the bad road."

"I right?" cried Favereau, stung with sudden remorse. "Man, it was I pushed you into it by both shoulders. And I am not sure," said he, after a moment's self-examination, "that I would not do it again. It does not tally with any theory of ethics, but so long as Helen is safeguarded, upon my soul, Edward, I would be ready to commit a crime."

The fellow-sinner, from his much deeper slough of culpability, could not but feel the immoral human comfort of this. He pressed his friend's hand with fingers to which some natural warmth was returning.

"Helen," he cried, "God bless her! Her confidence is the most lovely thing and the most heart-rending. Thank God, she is as far from suspecting the truth to-day as she was a week ago. But" — here the heavy mantle of depression began to fold itself afresh around him — "she knows me too well not to feel, not to have felt from the first, that there is something upon me — something between us.

Oh, that is the worst of all: there is something between my wife and me! Her sweet eyes are always asking: 'What is it? What is it?' I could bear the rest, Favereau," cried he, rising from his chair under the goad of his trouble. "Yet the torture that girl inflicts upon me, the way she holds the sword above my head as if by a thread of her flaxen hair from the edge of her little finger . . . it 's enough to make a madman — a madman or a murderer!"

He stopped his restless moving to look at his friend; and the back of the high chair upon which he had clenched his hands trembled and creaked. Favereau saw that indeed he had reached the very limit of endurance.

"Come, Edward," he exclaimed in his old mentor manner, "this is morbid! At any rate, be brave for but a little longer, and I promise you that deliverance will come."

He would have given a great deal to have been able to make some more definite assurance. But, while he hoped much from the result of his recent hints to Helen, the whole matter was so complicated and so critical that, like the physicist dealing with saturated solutions or unstable compounds, he felt that now the only chance of warding off the irrevocable crystallisation or the fatal explosion lay in avoiding the slightest shock, the most delicate intrusion.

Meanwhile, Cluny's voice went on in hoarse complaint:

"There is not a corner in my house where I feel

safe from her; not a moment of the day, unless I place miles between myself and my home, but I feel the shadow of her presence upon me. In company I cannot raise my eyes but I find that look with its terrible meaning, its claim of complicity, fixed upon my face. When she holds out her hand to me, night and morning, her very touch carries an illicit message. Ah, my God! Here, in my wife's house, in our house, our home!"

With a sudden flash Favereau understood. It was the wound to his honour, it was the frightful, vulgar treachery of the situation, the violation, unwilling though it was, of his wife's hearth, that was killing this man who had hitherto played with love and life so heedlessly. He remembered a story he had once read of a woman who was slowly tortured to death by the consciousness of a secret stain on her purity. And as he looked at his friend's face he questioned within himself whether, even if after all their plans were to succeed, Helen's happiness (bound up as it was in her husband's existence) were not in any case already marked by doom.

After an oppressive pause Cluny arose and, passing his hand across his forehead to brush away the gathered drops of anguish, began that restless pacing with which his associates of the last few days had already become but too familiar.

"That 's when I am in company," he pursued, as if there had been no pause in his speech. "Alone" — he halted beside Favereau's chair and struck the back of it with his hand — "I tell you, Favereau, I

am afraid to be alone; I never know when I shall find her at my elbow."

"But," said the elder man, "she has not spoken, has she? She has not dared to return to the subject?"

"No," answered Cluny, "no." His pale lips smiled in the despair which had passed beyond sorrow. "It is worse than if she spoke. Her silence claims me."

Again came a pause, heavy with the weight of the issueless dilemma. Once or twice Favereau opened his lips to speak; but then the knowledge of all words' futility withered them upon his mouth. At last he too sprang to his feet, and resolutely he endeavoured to shake off the paralysis of the encompassing misery.

"Come," he cried, "courage, courage! It is only for a little while longer. You will be rid of her."

Cluny turned upon his friend a countenance startling in its pallor, and laid his cold hand upon his wrist.

"Aye," he said, "but how? Look here," he went on, almost in a whisper, "I told you just now that the worst had come upon me. It was wrong: there is worse still to come. My happiness is gone, Helen's is going. God help us! My peace of mind is gone, my self-respect, my rest, all that makes life worth having, gone! And now, oh, Favereau, now, honour is going!"

"You mean ——"

"I mean that Helen's cousin has set his heart upon

Joy. That simple-minded, honest, honourable fellow; and I — I, his kinsman, his host in a foreign land — what am I to do?"

Favereau drew a long breath. He had thought to have looked the ugly situation so closely in the face already as to be unappalled by any of its aspects. But now he too hesitated and shrank. Yet it was only for a second. Stronger for good as he had been all his life than his friend, it now seemed as if he were the stronger for evil. He thought of Helen. "Let honour go," he said harshly.

With a fierce satisfaction, this fiat once pronounced, he felt that indeed the matter had passed beyond the possibility of recall. They were as men caught in the cog-wheels of a relentless machinery; they had themselves set it in motion, they were powerless to arrest it now. To be honourable towards George Dodd, to try and save him, would be to commit the unforgivable baseness of again betraying the first victim. There was nothing for it but to set their teeth and bear the tearing of the wheels in silence.

As he stood, his eyes on the ground, lost in his dark thoughts, he was roused by the nervous start of the Duke, whose hand was still on his arm. Following the direction of his friend's eyes, he looked out through the high-mullioned window and perceived, outlined in white against the green of yew hedges, the silhouette of a fair head, a delicate profile, a little throat — so pretty a picture, so piteously horrible to them both! After a second's breathless waiting Cluny drew back into the shadow of the room, just

as the head outside turned upon the slender neck and looked deliberately in.

Meeting Favereau's stern eyes, with a movement half anger, half fear, like a beautiful little snake disturbed in her basking in the sun, Joy glided away. And stirred to an unwonted heat of passion Favereau shot out a long arm and pulled down the blinds.

Then he turned to Cluny. In the sudden dimness of the room the two looked at each other: there was no need of words.

"Before heaven," cried Favereau, "I believe the expiation must be nearly complete!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE girl Joy sat upon the old weather-worn marble bench in the deep green recess cut out of the living hedge of laurel. Supporting her chin upon her clasped hands, her elbows resting on her knees, immobile, she brooded like a small white sphinx, gazing from within the shadow across the broad strip of sunlit walk, across the slope of green and the flaming geranium beds, to that deeply-embrasured window where a blind had been drawn down.

Behind her, in a niche cut for itself also out of the green wall, rose a slender pedestal whereon sat in marble a faun, cross-legged. Between his hairy goat's knees hung one careless hand, just holding the pipes. The long dead creator of that smiling carven face had contrived to throw into its young man's features, under the budding horns, an extraordinary expression of all-time mockery. This creature, with the wisdom of the gods and the passions of the animal, grinned out upon the world in eternal cynicism. Who knew as well as he that man walks with the beasts, and that even from the very seat of an intellect that aspired to commune with the gods there grow the horns of earthliness?

As the light breeze threw dancing shadows across his face, his smiling marble lips seemed to be twisted into laughter, the opaque eyes to flicker in "scorn and pity and awful eternal knowledge" of the folly of all things in this fleeting show of life. . . . Pipe while ye may, poor human children! Take what you can, the roses pass and youth is but a day: dance while ye can to my piping! He had expounded his pagan allegory for more than two hundred years to the lives that fretted their little span away beneath his shadow. And some had taken his advice and some had not; but all alike, through sunshine or through snow, had been in the end carried past him downhill on the self-same path to the churchyard below. And he smiled on!

To-day, beneath him under the trembling shadows of the leaves, sat one who, had she breathed in the good old days when gods still walked the earth, when man's passion was his only law, woman's beauty her acknowledged power, a moment's joy the gift of the immortals, might well have danced with this faun in forest glades, and found sufficient wisdom in his piping call.

Here sat she, unhappy! *Why should she be unhappy, she that was young, and strong, and beautiful?*

"*Perfectly absurd,*" said the faun. "*Had she not as much right to love as any other? And if she loved one man, had she not a right to his love as well as any other who loved him too? That was only common-sense,*" assured the stone lips.

And that other, she had had her day. She was

growing old. Joy had counted three silver hairs on her temples that very morning. *The old must make room for the young!*

The wing of the breeze beat a branch of the cypress tree; a quick shade swept across the faun's face, and his mouth writhed in a silent convulsion of laughter.

"*Nature's law, my dear!*" he chuckled. "*World's law — the only law.*"

This morning Joy had been so hopeful. The spring-like beauty of the autumn day had got into her young veins. The sunshine had been bright, the grass green, the scent of the roses endlessly sweet. It seemed part of the very design of the world that she should be happy again as she once had been.

Down in the rose garden she had tested her powers on two men: a strong one and a weak one. And she knew that she could fool them both if she chose. *And he, he had loved her, he loved her still! Why, then, should they not be happy?*

"*My very tune,*" said the faun; "*I have set my pipe to the world's desire.*"

His hand trembled when it touched hers. He grew pale when he looked at her. Why should he avoid her, but that he too was haunted as she was? Why did he not go away? Aye, why not send her away if he did not love her? Love her!

The little pagan flushed from paleness into deep rose-red and shook from head to foot as she thought of the love that was in her.

The faun nodded at her: "*Evoe!*" That was the sort of love he could tell of. The loves of men and maids, of mortals and gods, love that recked of nothing but its own glory, that made such joys, such hates, such deaths, that they were still sung of, and would still be sung of when even the last atom of his stone should have crumbled to the shapeless dust.

But he had pulled down the blind. It had been pulled down angrily, as if to shut her out. It had been pulled down relentlessly. It had seemed to shut out all the sunshine that had been flooding into her heart: to silence all the hope. What bird can sing in a darkened room! She had once seen them thus pull down the blind of a room where lay a corpse, and everything had grown so dark, so black! Her heart shuddered with a great fear. *Oh no, their love was not dead! It was young, strong; she had only just begun to love. She had so much to give!*

Joy sprang to her feet, and turned in the fury and agony of her passion upon the faun.

"God cannot be so cruel," she cried; "we must be happy again!"

She flung out her hands. But the faun was cold and hard. His smile was meaningless. He was a mere lump of stone. The faun knew nothing about God.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE sought her with dogged patience, set in his purpose. "I 'll be hanged if I stand another day of it," he said.

As to most of those who have not frittered away their energies for love in myriad different channels of indifferent depths, the master-passion had come to George Dodd as an overwhelming tide. There was every reason why the hard, practical man in him should hesitate before the idea of such a union. He had often said: "What had a sailor to do with a wife? His bride is the sea!" With that longing for a home of his own implanted in every wholesome nature, he had hitherto deliberately sacrificed such joys to his ambition; none knew better from observation than he what a clog a wife and little ones are to the feet of one who would advance rapidly in his profession. Moreover, he had, in an intensified degree, the national love of freedom. Early cast upon his own resources, he had been all his life accustomed to judge and act from the personal point of view. "I must have elbow-room" had been a favourite expression of his. And, striking for fame and fortune, he had done so hitherto with a feeling

of absolute independence. To his mind the thought in danger: "If I fall, no one is the worse for it," amply compensated for the fact that in victory no one would be the more joyful for it.

The manner, moreover, in which he had been thrown among strangers from his childhood by his mother's foreign marriage had given him a violent prejudice against mixed alliances. "Americans should marry Americans; the country is big enough for choice, and as a race we are good enough for each other. That is so." This had been another of his hard and fast rules for the guidance of self and others. But now — well, he had already experienced the "accidents of war" before which no previous theory can stand, when an elemental spirit of fight or an inborn flash of genius alone can retrieve the situation. To-day he was confronted by the "accident of love," and he realised that before this elemental human passion no built-up wall of cool resolve, no well-laid-out scheme of life can stand. Under the pulse of his enkindled blood he saw but one course before him: to carry his heart's desire at whatever cost. And he as little thought of pause, of possible failure, of future disability, as does the soldier in his rush to triumph or annihilation.

Well might the stone faun grin, year in, year out, from over his crossed goat-legs, upon this old, old world: so self-complacently enlightened, so theoretically advanced, so æsthetically civilised — so elementally the same!

. . . . . .

Among the many tools of which the ambitious sailor had made use for the fashioning of his career was the study of languages, for which reason indeed he had now been specially selected for his present mission. And characteristically enough, having kept himself sternly aloof from all personal acquaintance with the sordid passions of life, he had a secret romantic love of poetry.

As, in reward of his peregrinations, he at length caught a glimpse of a white figure in the green recess at the end of the terrace, a line of Heine which he remembered to have haunted him — oddly enough with its sheer music of words — one full, purple, solitary night on tropical seas, as he tramped his deck till dawn, now sprang again to his mind with a sudden intimate meaning:

"Die Kleine, die Reine, die Feine, die Eine, die Eine!"

If ever a poet out of his own heart sang the love of another man, surely the Jew had sung the sailor's wonderful sweetheart: *Little* — just as high as his heart — child to him at once and woman! *Dainty?* Why, there was no word in his own tongue to express this perfection of daintiness, save, indeed, now the one word: Joy. *Pure!* His heart contracted with a feeling that was almost pain at the thought of his beloved's exquisite purity, an attribute so divine in woman, so personal it seemed to herself, so immeasurably above his rough man's nature, that even to dare ponder upon it became a sort of desecration. The *Pure*, and last of all — oh, wonderful sickly

poet to have thus cried the cry of the strong lover's soul! — the *One*, the *only One!*

. . . . . .

Had she seen him coming? She showed no surprise; showed neither pleasure nor the reverse; merely shifted her attitude a little, as he took a seat beside her, and turned a face supported on the palm of her hand sufficiently in his direction to bring him under the glance of her eyes. These curious eyes of hers were so nearly hidden under the drooping lids that all he could see of them between the thick lashes was a long liquid gleam. It was only afterwards that these details came back to his mind. Then he merely knew, by the thick beating of his heart and the stress of his emotion that he, the man, was at the mercy of this little crouching wisp of a creature that he could have caught up in his arms and run away with, laughing.

"Miss Joy," he began, after a pause as long as a century to him, "I have been looking for you this hour."

The dark stars of her pupils slid away from their cool contemplation of his face to seek once more the window where the blind was pulled down.

George Dodd drew a long breath. He did not waver in his determination; but the preliminaries seemed to him diabolically difficult. Clutching the ledge of the bench with both hands he began afresh:

"You were n't hiding from me, were you?"

The girl's eyes went back to him. The long lashes were lifted a little. The childish mouth parted.

"Hiding?" she repeated, composed to the verge of impertinence.

"You are not afraid of me?" asked the sailor, incoherently tender.

Joy's short white teeth flashed for a second. Then, reflectively and slowly, as if weighing the truth of her own words, she said:

"I don't think I know what it is to be afraid. Have I ever been afraid of any one? I do not think so."

No sooner were the words spoken than the memory of one — a horrid, wise-eyed, grey-bearded man — whose look she could not meet, whose very presence seemed to paralyse her, struck chill upon her heart. She shivered. The man beside her saw the sudden alteration of her features, felt her tremble; his passion leaped out, goaded by tenderness.

"Yes, you are frightened! Good God, afraid of me! Look at me: I am a rough strong fellow, yet it is I who am frightened. Ah, you don't know what a man feels before such a being as you! My dear, I can't make pretty speeches. I — I — Joy, I love you!"

He held out his great brown hand, and indeed it shook.

Joy's eyes now rested upon it. His words echoed idly enough in her ears. The tempestuous circling of her thoughts round a single central, towering idea, caught them, tossed them, as the waters of the whirlpool catch and toss straws and broken twigs, only to cast them finally away.

Love. Love? Love! What could this one know of the love I know? Oh, what ugly, coarse hands! The nails have been broken, the veins stand out like cords. My lover's hands are the hands of a king. When he laid his hand upon my cheek, his touch was like music. I kissed his hand, then he let it lie in mine. He has such long fingers, and they taper. The nails are like almonds. I remember how I looked at his palm and then I kissed it. My prince! And did he think I should not know it again? Ah, but I kissed it again!

"I love you," repeated Dodd, drawing nearer to her. He saw that her whiteness had become coloured as from an inner crimson flame; and he took heart of grace, stretched out his arm to enfold her, but then paused tremulously on the brink of bliss for chivalrous awe of her delicate maidenliness.

"Do you love me? Do you love me?" he cried, varying his note unconsciously.

It was as if the crimson flame flickered and died out. The dark eyes in the pale face looked at him full; but they were now as if veiled, and told him nothing of the soul within. Nevertheless he could not but feel her detachment, and for the first time an icy doubt of success gripped him.

"Speak, answer me," he pleaded. "At least tell me if I may hope."

After a wait, as though the cry had taken some time to reach her in the midst of her own thoughts, Joy said, with a sort of deliberate impatience:

"What is it you want of me? What can I say?"

"I want you for my wife," said the other, with his square simplicity. "I want you to say you love me."

All at once there shot a light into her veiled eyes, a new flame so eager that, quick, the long lids must droop to hide it. Her slight frame swayed under the pulse of a new hope.

He (there was only one being beside herself in her world: the rest were shadows.) — *he should be made to pull up that blind! Ah, there were things no love could bear! Did she not know it? She had learned many things this last month; she had learned the strength of love's endurance; she had learned its limit. He might be silent so long as he knew her there, safe, his own if he chose. But now she would make him speak, if it was only a word that he and she alone could understand.*

"I may hope, then," cried the sailor, joyfully, as he marked how she thrilled and flushed and wavered.

She replied dreamily: "I don't know."

He caught her hand. "That means ——" he exclaimed joyfully. There seemed now but the breadth of a second, but a span of space between him and those pure, fresh lips, yet the next instant found him alone upon the bench.

She had disengaged herself as quickly as a bird. He dared not close his great grasp upon her, and she was free. A pace away from him she stood, smiling and dimpling.

"Ask the Duke," she said.

It was very sweet. She was adorable. But he wanted his kiss — that kiss he had dreamed of day

and night since that first evening; he wanted it more madly than he had ever wanted anything. But as he sprang to claim it, once again, in some indefinable way, she held him back.

"Ask the Duke," said she again, slowly.

He gazed after her; did not attempt to follow her as she moved about with deliberate steps, passing in and out of shadows and sunshine, and finally standing for a second to look back at him once again, an airy white silhouette against a patch of blue sky. Then she was gone.

The sailor stood and stared. He felt baffled, puzzled. But man, born out of mystery, surrounded by mystery, going to mystery, is ever most allured and drawn by mystery. Moreover, from all time, the desire is greater than any possible realisation. This attraction for the unknown, for the elusive ideal, seems a law of our human life leading the seeker to revelation or perdition. All creative arts, all music, all poetry or science, all glory of love, all in fine that is beautiful and high, comes to us in and through this striving, and that is *revelation.* The *perdition* comes when the ideal has flown: when the mystery is solved or believed to be solved.

George Dodd now was ten times more enamoured, ten times more set on his purpose than he had been an hour ago; and indeed he was far enough from the solution of his mystery.

. . . . . .

"I take it," he said to himself at last, after reviewing as well as his troubled thoughts would allow

him the few words he had been vouchsafed, "I take it it 's the French custom. Silly sort of custom I call it — silly as all the rest. . . . The little fay! 'Ask the Duke,' she said. But she stopped. Aye, she stopped twice and looked back! George Dodd, I believe you 've been a fool. You could have had that kiss."

He fell back upon the bench again and into a passionate reverie. Over his head the faun smiled on, with young lips and old eyes.

"Great heaven!" cried the sailor suddenly, and sprang to his feet. "What am I doing here? Love does make a pretty kind of fool of a man. Well, I 'll go and ask that Duke — and then ——" His strong, clean-cut lips broke into a smile.

What a rare tune the faun could have piped!

CHAPTER XXIX

IN the library sat a tweed-clad Nessie with her feet on the fender, pointing, ludicrously minute, towards the faint wood fire (for misery had made her cold, despite the glorious sunshine); in one hand was a pocket-handkerchief, large enough to receive five or six moderate-sized tears, in the other a cup of tea. These she alternately brandished at a patiently sympathetic Helen.

"But, really, Nessie," the latter was repeating for the tenth time, "is it not foolish of you not to wait for the answer to Lebel's telegram?"

"I guess there being no answer is a bad sign," cried the anxious wife and rattled her tea-cup vindictively. "I hope you'll feel sorry, Helen, when you find out how you misjudged a poor dying man. He may n't have been a pattern; but, after all, you should n't forget that he is my husband."

She drew up her little figure and finished her cup of tea with a dignified gulp. Then she deposited it on the table, and taking the pocket-handkerchief by two corners held it up ready for emergencies.

"If you come to think of it," she whimpered, "he must be pretty bad to have asked for so little. He m — m — must have been quite delirious!"

The scrap of a pocket-handkerchief was here flung over the scrap of a face, and Madame Rodriguez surrendered herself to woe just as Jean the footman made his entrance with the expected dispatch upon his salver.

"A telegram for Madame. Monsieur le Docteur sent it," he explained, rolling his eyes with all the French servant's open sympathy for his superior's distress.

The Duchess took the folded slip and dismissed the man with her friendly gesture. Then she laid the missive on Nessie's knee. The small olive fingers clutching the handkerchief were shifted sufficiently to allow a corner of a black eye to peer down suspiciously at the blue document.

"Don't be afraid," said the Duchess, unfailingly amused by her friend's odd gestures, which always reminded her of some small, innocent animal: bird, kitten, or squirrel. Many a time had Helen seen her beloved squirrels peer down at her from the trees in the park with just such an expression of unconsciously comical doubt. "Don't be afraid," said she; "it must be good news, or Lebel would not have sent it to us like this."

Here both the black eyes came into view. They looked at Helen, blinking once or twice. An expression of relief, succeeded by a dawning fury, first relaxed then tightened the pretty, impish face.

Madame Rodriguez shook the telegram open and sprang to her feet. Her features became suffused with a dark flush. She opened her mouth and choked silently.

"Nessie!" The Duchess was frightened. Could the Doctor, after all, have sent her evil tidings so brutally?

Nessie gave a gasp, then broke into harsh, loud laughter.

"Famous! Oh, famous!" she cried. "Listen." Her hands shook as she lifted the sheet and read aloud, her voice rising almost to a shriek. "Listen:

"'No case typhus in any hotel here. Gentleman called Rodriguez perfectly well. At present in Casino pigeon-shooting match. Evidently some mistake. — SCHREIBER.'"

"Dear Nessie," cried Helen, and encircled her friend with her arms, "I am so glad!"

"Glad?" echoed Nessie. "Glad!" Her gathering fury overflowed; she flung off the embrace. "Helen, you make me tired. Glad, indeed! Glad to see me bamboozled and insulted and betrayed by that — that nigger! Oh, oh!" She beat the air with her hands. "I 'll never believe another word he says — no, not if he were a corpse before me. Oh, oh, oh!"

"Hush!" cried the Duchess. "Take care, my dear. If the child were to come in."

If one thing is repugnant to an habitually self-controlled nature it is the loss of personal dignity in another. Helen's tone was rebuking, and Nessie was quick to feel it so. She turned off the rattling artillery of her anger with the most surprising sharpness and glared a full five seconds in silence. Then, with a subdued intensity of indignation every whit

as effective: "Oh," she remarked witheringly, "I won't pervert your precious innocent. I 'll go to my room. Yes, yes, I will, I 'll go and write to my lawyer." She rose. "As for that child, as you call her," she continued, "believe me, it is n't I that could teach her anything, good or bad. . . . She 's the only creature I ever saw that would about match Rodriguez for slyness."

The door was banged. Every recognised feminine petulance was Nessie's, but she invested them with a fresh briskness quite her own.

Helen flushed angrily in her turn. "Oh, poor Nessie! How unjust, how wicked! How sorry she will be in a minute or two!"

CHAPTER XXX

"MAY I ask," said the Marquise de Lormes with elaborate politeness, "if that was the young person whom they call Mademoiselle Gioja who was sitting with you just now?"

Sailing down the terrace at the end of her afternoon constitutional, she had come upon her elder son at the very moment when, fired with new resolution, he was about to seek the Duke.

The purple silk was kilted up at intervals by the simple expedient of loops of elastic and buttons (an elegant reminiscence of the days of crinoline) and displayed the famous Church feet which neither age, corpulence, nor even (oh, horror!) elastic-side boots could altogether rob of shapeliness; a Swiss garden-hat was tied with great precision under the second chin; grey silk mittens encased the plump, bejewelled hands.

"How Mother has got herself up!" thought the sailor, unfilially, as his first glance fell upon her. But the second swiftly corrected the hasty impression. The Marian Church, who in her girlhood had ruled over hundreds of slaves in her beautiful southern home, had found ample scope for her

imperious nature in the social position given by her second marriage, a position which cut her off, as one among the elect, from the common herd of mortals. The rest of the world outside the Almanach de Gotha was to the Marquise de Lormes (*née* Church) what the coloured people had been on her father's estate — just human beings whom Providence had manifestly destined to be useful to her and her peers. Nothing is more imposing to others than such an intimate conviction of superiority; and George Dodd's second reflection, under his mother's cold rebuking eye, was decidedly one of more respect.

"By Jingo, she 's a regular Queen of Sheba," was the reversed judgment.

"I rather think it was Mademoiselle Gioja," he said, answering her acid question good-naturedly. "Yes, I rather think it was."

Even if he would ever have been inclined to recognise the right of a mother's interference in so private a concern as a man's love, she had herself so deliberately forfeited all such right of her own choice that he was the more disposed to meet her present attitude with humourous indifference.

"Indeed!" She lowered her white silk parasol with the fringes — the same parasol that had first been upheld to shut out from the young Marquise de Lormes' "legitimist" eyes the shocking sight of the upstart woman whom Paris called the Empress Eugénie. "Indeed!"

"Well, Ma'am?" said her son, with a twinkle in his eye.

His tone, his look, the sound of the words, evoked an unwelcome memory. Among his other shortcomings George had been tactless enough to inherit a remarkable likeness to his father. Actual hostility began to gleam behind the mere coldness of the Marquise's eye.

"In this country," she said, "it is not customary for gentlemen to engage young ladies in conversation by themselves in secluded spots."

"Well, you see," said Mr. Dodd, with a maliciously exaggerated airiness, "I had something very particular to say to that young lady, and I don't happen, you see (thank my stars!), to belong to this country."

Madame de Lormes' hand shook, but she continued as if she had not heard her son's remark:

"In this country, in our society, if a young girl so far forgets proprieties as to have clandestine meetings with gentlemen, it is supposed to be the part of the gentlemen to refrain from taking advantage of such immodest behaviour, were it only out of respect to those whose hospitality he is enjoying."

The cool bronze of the sailor's cheek deepened to copper; he had a slow temper, but it was ill to subdue when once kindled, and it was now beginning to smoulder. He drove his hands into his pockets and faced his formidable mother squarely.

"Look here, Mother," he said, still good-humouredly, but with a note of warning, "I don't think I've made much out of those last remarks of yours. Yet all the same, it strikes me that they aren't altogether

dictated by a spirit of kindness either towards myself or towards" — he hesitated, his voice softened — "towards Miss Joy. In case you feel inclined to steer any further on the same course, I think it's just as well to let you know that the young lady in question is going to be your own daughter-in-law."

"Going to be my daughter-in-law!" Madame de Lormes' horror was voiceless, but her lips formed the words in dumb show. She tottered and had to support herself on the handle of the fringed parasol. Then the power of expression returned to her in force. "Going to be my daughter-in-law!" she said in bass tones that would have made the fortune of a tragedian.

George Dodd was extremely amused, more so perhaps than the occasion seemed to warrant. He was as good a fellow as ever breathed, but he had old scores against his mother's vicarious pride of birth.

"Yes: if your son can make her so," he affirmed, and showed all his strong teeth.

The unmistakable mischievousness in his expression struck the Marquise with a new horror almost too hideous to be formulated.

"Is it possible, Sir, that you can refer to my son, the Marquis de Lormes?" ejaculated she; and only (as she afterwards averred to a kindred soul in the Rue St. Dominique) the benevolence of Heaven itself kept her from swooning on the spot. Whether or not the benevolence of Heaven was actively engaged upon sustaining the lady at that moment, it is certain that what commoner mortals would call plainly a

good hot temper had something to do with the stiffening of her frame.

"No, Ma'am," said the sailor, "I refer to your son, Lieutenant George P. Dodd." Then he added: "And, Ma'am, I will add that if I could think that little individual capable even of the thought of making such a choice for himself, he would rise considerably higher in my estimation than he stands now. To be frank with you, Ma'am, he does n't stand at any giddy altitude there just now."

These words, while they removed the great lady's first appalling anxiety, added considerably to her anger.

"I might have known," she began, icy on the surface of her boiling heat, "that from a Marquis de Lormes I need have had no fear of such degradation."

"Degradation! Take care, if you please," said the man, warningly mild.

"But, however you may forget," she went on with a deadly flow of words, "your duties as a son — and indeed it is but what I have been so well accustomed to almost from your very birth ——"

"I take it," interrupted he, speaking in a sort of soliloquy, "that when that commandment to which I presume you refer was framed, the Almighty meant it for those boys and girls that have a father and mother at home to honour. It is n't so very easy always to behave scripturally to a parent across three thousand miles of ocean."

Madame de Lormes paused, breathed deeply, and glared. Then, it being evident that her direct attack

was likely to be more than parried, she went off suddenly at a fierce tangent:

"That girl!" she said. "You presume to ask my permission to introduce a person of such a description into my family?"

"I do not," said Mr. Dodd. "I merely communicate my intention."

"I forbid it," cried the lady. "Do you know, Sir, whence she has sprung?"

"I do not, Ma'am, and I don't much care."

"Rash, unhappy man, do you not see what she is?"

"Well," said the son, "that's just it: I do see what she is." The slow fire in his eye kindled now into flame.

"Ah, you think you can defy me," cried she, almost losing self-control. "But, thank God," she laughed hysterically, "the customs of this country are not those of the unbridled land where you were brought up! There are laws, Sir, here, specially framed to protect families, homes, mothers, against such disgrace as you would bring upon them; laws to prevent the introduction into distinguished households of such intriguing upstarts as that young person. I shall speak to Helen. This affair shall go no further. I shall speak to the Duke; he shall refuse his consent."

She turned and began to move her vast proportions with incredible celerity towards the house. The man turned also and walked beside her with long, easy strides.

"I 'm going to speak to the Duke myself," he said

CHAPTER XXXI

THE relatives of the Marquise de Lormes were accustomed to behold that lady moved to majestic wrath at least two or three times in the course of the day. There were so many in the imperfect world outside her own especial radius who offended her peculiar sensitiveness, so few even in that select circle who understood the true inwardness of their position as she did, that it was no wonder (as she frequently told her friends) that "the blade was wearing out the scabbard."

Therefore, when she entered into the library, breathless from haste, with portentous storm-clouds lowering upon her massive brow, the three who were seated in such apparent comfort round the tea-table beheld these symptoms without much surprise.

Helen, busy in the preparation of fresh tea, drew a slight sigh which breathed more of resignation than anxiety. If Joy, crouching by her side, pensive and quiet upon a little stool, had not as swiftly veiled the upward glance she cast upon the new-comer, cool contempt would have been the emotion read in the unchildlike eyes of the child face. Totol, with a large piece of cake sticking in one lean cheek, stopped

his busy jaws for a second to gaze with protruding orbs and to draw his lips into an expressive voiceless whistle; he then rounded his little shoulders philosophically and went on with his mastication.

"*Tiens, Maman in a rage again!*"

George Dodd followed his mother into the room with an exaggerated sea-lurch, a slight smile on his lips, and that aggressive air of ease and indifference which in some natures covers a white heat of emotion.

As Madame de Lormes was for the first moment or two quite incapable of speech, he took the lead, and, slipping into a chair behind Helen, murmured into her ear, keeping his eyes on Joy's pale averted cheek the while:

"Helen, you 'd best prepare for a squall. My mother is in a tantrum this time and no mistake."

"My niece," gasped Madame de Lormes, "where is your husband?" She drew a heaving breath, untied the ribands of her hat and flung them over her shoulders. Her massive body was trembling. "I have to speak to the Duke," she continued, raising her voice.

"So have I," said Mr. Dodd, quietly. He saw the long, dark lashes flutter on the little rim of white cheek.

This time Totol was fain to swallow his cake with a rapid gulp and to bestow undivided attention to a situation of incomparable interest. He rolled his eyes from his mother to his brother, and his quick wits leaped to an approximation of the truth.

In Helen's mind too a prescience of the forthcoming disclosure began to dawn. She also looked from her aunt to her cousin wistfully, and then her tender eyes rested on the fair head at her knee. The true woman's pity for the maiden upon whose young shoulders the weight of life is about to be laid, the true woman's joy in the thought of love, a mother's regret, a mother's anxiety, withal a personal relief at the solution of an embarrassing situation — all these feelings were struggling in her heart.

Madame de Lormes' voice broke sternly upon the momentary silence.

"Helen," it said, "I am sorry to interrupt your meal, but I must request you to have the Duke informed that I desire to speak with him here, instantly, in the presence of the Marquis de Lormes, my son, head of our family."

Totol here performed the excellent feat of presenting a profile of deadly seriousness to his mother on the one side, while he administered a humourous wink and grimace to Helen on the other.

"My son, the Marquis de Lormes," reiterated the irate lady, "and in your presence, Helen" — there was withering reproach in her look and tone — "and likewise in the presence of Mr. Dodd, my elder son."

My elder son! Never had the poor lady felt the bitterness of this substantial fact so keenly as at this moment. She paused here.

"Certainly, Aunt," said Helen, nervously. "Joy, my child, do you know where the Duke is?"

Joy rose, straight and small and slim; stood

before her patroness with hanging arms and downcast eyes, the picture (thought her lover) of all pretty, modest girlishness.

"Yes, Godmother," said she.

Madame de Lormes extended a shaking, mittened hand with pointed index.

"The presence of Mademoiselle," said she, "we can dispense with."

"Not at all," asserted Mr. Dodd; "her presence cannot at all be dispensed with. I particularly desire that she should hear every word I have to say.—The decks are cleared for action," he said to himself, "and, by George, we'll fight this business out to-day!"

The Duchess hesitated, glanced once again from her aunt's flushed and furious countenance to the sailor's composed features; she met his steady, sea-blue eyes, and he smiled at her ever so slightly. His square hand rested on the back of her chair. The feeling of his presence was that of a tower of strength. This was the first man she had ever known in whom the stress of emotion seemed to increase self-control and self-confidence.

"Joy," she said then, very gently, "try if you can find the Duke and tell him that I should like to see him here."

George rose. "And then, Miss Joy, come back yourself, if you please," added he.

"Yes, my child," said Helen.

The girl moved to the door which Mr. Dodd, preceding her, held open for her. Madame de Lormes snorted and flung herself back in her arm-chair.

"I am afraid," thought Totol, "that we are turning to the sentimental. *Aïe, aïe!* It is that that will bore me! Luckily," he reflected further, "we may trust the Mamma to put some life into us."

Indeed, Madame de Lormes was even then collecting her thunders to that intent.

"I may as well inform you first as last, Helen," said she, "that I utterly and absolutely refuse my sanction to my son George's insane purpose. Both the Marquis and myself—"

"Well, perhaps it might be useful for me to state first, Ma'am, what this purpose of mine is," cut in George, in his cool slow tone. "My purpose, Cousin Helen, is to marry your adopted daughter, Joy. And I 'm not very clear in my mind that I want anybody's permission to do so, except hers. But it seems to be part of the ceremony in this house 'to ask the Duke,' and I don't mind falling in so far with your French ways. Therefore I *am* going to ask the Duke. There is no harm in adding, however, that I don't care much what the Duke says on this subject, if only she says the right thing. And she 's as good as said it already, I may tell you."

"Oh!" cried Madame de Lormes, and "Oh!" again. Then with impotent dignity she declared: "Understand, Helen, I have absolutely refused my consent. Anatole, Marquis de Lormes, speak you also, my son."

Totol cracked his fingers and drew up his knees. His wizened face became contracted into wrinkles expressive of wisdom and benevolence.

"Look here, Mamma," he remarked, "I don't mind saying anything in the world you fancy. But what is the use? Did I not nearly kill myself this morning in the rose-garden trying to make him see reason? He's romantic, you see, romantic, and that's the devil! George, my little brother, you are shockingly romantic, you know."

"Helen," interrupted the Marquise, who would have been a fool indeed not to perceive that upon the sturdy sailor all her energies were wasted, and who, moreover, was alarmed by her niece's silence, "Helen, I have been more than a mother to you: will you, too, turn upon me in my old age?"

Struck by the words, Helen looked up, and there were tears in her eyes.

"God knows," she cried piteously, "I owe you much, Aunt. But what is it you want me to do? Is it not the happiness of two young lives that is at stake? Let us be patient. I must hear more before I speak."

Hear more, when the Marquise de Lormes had already given her opinion! Astonishment almost suffocated the lady.

"It is Mamma who will require her little calming drops to-night, oh, yes!" reflected the younger son, as he helped himself to another sandwich, shaking his head meanwhile with a reproving expression of countenance.

From the post which he had resumed behind Helen's chair George spoke again.

"I am sorry," he said, looking with a sort of com-

passion at the Marquise's inflamed countenance, "to see my mother so upset; but I do claim that a man must have the right to choose for himself what he wants for his own happiness. Helen," he went on in a lower voice, "you 'll not try to come between me and my happiness, will you?"

He stretched his hand to her as he spoke and Helen put hers into it.

"No, George," she answered, and was once more glad to drown her doubts in the depths of his steady eyes. "If I can help you to your happiness, I will." Then smiling, under her breath she added as the door opened: "And here it comes!"

CHAPTER XXXII

IT is easily conceivable that the doomed man who feels the end draw near, by hideous degrees, with every tick of the clock, should hail at last with relief the announcement that the inevitable hour has struck. No more sickening alternations of hopes and fears now, no more ghastly visions in the night, no more impotent furies or cold despairs: it is the end!

When the little tap came to the study door (Joy always knew where to find the Duke), when Favereau went to open it and disclosed the white figure, Cluny felt borne in upon him the strong, inexplicable conviction that his hour had come; and at the same moment his doubt, his agony, his apprehension were superseded by an extraordinary quietude.

"It is the end," he said to himself with stern composure. "It is the end."

He smiled as the girl delivered her message: "The Duke's presence was desired in the library." It was in the fitness of things that her voice should be the one to summon him to his fate.

"Precede us, Mademoiselle, and say that we are coming," he replied.

It was the first time since her entry into his house that he had looked at her frankly and spoken to her naturally.

She had, as usual, her own reasons for curtaining her tell-tale eyes, afire just now with irrepressible expectation. But, vaguely struck by something unusual, she could not refrain from casting a swift, biting glance at him before turning away.

"What is it?" she said to herself. "He is different. Is it that bad old man? It never means good to me when they are closeted together. But wait, my Duke, wait! I will make you show your heart."

Fortune had indeed favoured her. The plan she had first conceived on the mere chance of provoking some expression of feeling from the Duke which would give a little ease to her hungry heart had succeeded beyond her utmost expectation: Dodd's unexpected high-handedness would now afford her an opportunity of seeing with her own eyes how matters really stood with her lover.

She smiled upon the thought. Her quick wits had already rehearsed the whole scene, had settled every detail with a childish simplicity of confidence mingling with the fierceness of her woman's passion.

He should not betray himself to the others; no, that was not in her arrangements. But, master of dissimulation as he was, she would be able to interpret his every word, his every look. Oh, she could see it all! First, there would be M. Dodd, with his proposal. (She laughed to herself.) Toto! would

be raging too. (How droll!) The Duke would then see how others wanted her. Ah, that would strike home! Then would come his refusal of course — a dead, point-blank, cold refusal. "Impossible! the thing absurd! What reason? None. Not to be discussed, that was all?" The others would think it was all his pride. "A nameless girl marry into his family? Not to be thought of!" The old woman would rejoice. Let her rejoice; let them all think what they liked! She would just look at the Duke, and the Duke would look at her — a long, long look. "*You know*," his eyes would say; and, "*I know*," hers would answer. That was little enough, before Heaven! But to her, in her destitution, how much! Ah, the sweetness of that moment when it would come! Great God, how she loved him! . . . She turned the handle of the library door and slipped in, leaving it open.

As the two men reached the threshold, Favereau stopped; his face was troubled.

"Have you any idea," he whispered to the Duke, "of what this is about?"

"Let us go in!" said the other, briefly. Then he added, quite irrelevantly: "You did your best for me, old man, you did your best." His eyes were extraordinarily bright in his pale face.

"I must stand by him," resolved Favereau; and he felt "the rat, anxiety," gnaw at his heart with physical pain.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE early autumn dusk was falling after the golden day. Shadows were beginning to fill the dim heights and corners of the library. With the evening had come a chilliness over the land — the far-away breath of the death that was slowly advancing with winter from the north. Logs had therefore been piled again on Cluny's never extinguished fire, and the charming, flickering light of the wood flames danced on the group round the tea-table. Now it played on the dark gold of Helen's head, now on the pale baby-curls of the girl seated by her knee; now it threw the set strong profile of the sailor into high relief, or fantastically illumined the little Marquis' gnome-like visage.

The Marquise de Lormes was lying back in her arm-chair under the shadow of the screen; but as the Duke and Favereau entered her voice dominated Helen's greeting and Totol's jocular remark:

"Family council. Sentimental comedy *à la Feuillet*, beginning of Act II."

"Charles-Edward," entoned the "*mère noble*," "I thank you for your promptitude in coming to my summons. You find us in a most painful and

anxious situation. I look to you, master of this house, to uphold me in my maternal rights, and to assist me in guarding the family dignity." Here the fine roundness of her voice underwent a sudden icy change. "I did not see," she said, "that you were accompanied by Monsieur Favereau. Charles-Edward, this is a family matter."

Favereau laughed. It was impossible to be more determined than he was to keep his ground, but his manner was seemingly that of the utmost alacrity.

"A thousand pardons!" he said. "I blush for my indiscretion. But pray forgive me, Madame. They have so spoiled me here by treating me as one of the family, that I am sometimes forgetful enough really to consider myself as such. I will at once retire."

There was, and at once, of course, the protest he expected. Helen stretched out her hand to arrest his perfunctory show of exit.

"Indeed, we always want your wise head and your kind heart," she exclaimed, "and never more than now."

"Favereau stays." The two words fell from the Duke's lips with a very unusual accent of authority.

Dodd smiled humourously. If any one had told him a month ago that he would propose for the girl he wanted, "French fashion," before a whole room full of people, he would have called him most likely an "iridescent ass," or some equally picturesque name. But now — go to! He was ready to see the matter through in thorough style: therefore the more the merrier.

His mother's chair creaked under an impatient movement; flap-flap went her fan with an energy calculated, as Dodd said to himself, to make them all feel hot. Then she spoke again.

"It seems that the whole proceedings are to be carried out in a very curious fashion. I protest. Helen, before your husband, I call upon you again to dismiss Mademoiselle from a council at which her presence is most indecorous."

"Mademoiselle remains," said the American. If there had been authority in the Duke's voice, there was mastery in that of the sailor.

Cluny, standing by the table — "the criminal should stand in the dock," he had said to himself, in his new mood of ghastly irony — glanced quickly at the last speaker. Dodd was still smiling. And Cluny, man of nerves as sensitive as a woman's, man of impulses, delicacies, susceptibilities, high-strung passions and poetic ideals, knew that in that solid, healthy, unemotional frame, behind that good-humoured mask sat a spirit of iron resolve; and knew too that the collision of their fates would be his own doom.

Then Madame de Lormes, after the pause necessary for the controlling of her indignation at this monstrous filial disrespect, spoke again.

"It only remains for me to expose the state of affairs to the Duke of Cluny." But her rolling period was broken into by the American.

"I take it," said he, "that, as I am the principal person interested, I had better take the lead in this

affair." (The Marquise subsided with a groan.) "It is n't anything so out of the way, either," pursued the sailor, cheerfully.

He was quite sure of his girl by this time. The little creature (he told himself), for all her funny foreign ways, would never have led him on like this if she were not in earnest. Now and again, in the firelight flashes, he caught a glimpse of her cheek, unwontedly crimsoned: and his heart leaped. He felt a conqueror's joy in her blushes. And he would not spare them; it was part of the sweet punishment she deserved for playing with his strong man's love; and the rest of the score should be settled in a very little while, when his kisses should again bring the young blood to her cheeks more hotly and more beautifully still.

"It is n't anything so much out of the way," repeated he. "In my country it 's the sort of little business which is settled just between two, and we consider that the parents don't come into it at all, except in the way of blessing. But being in France, and having got some very French relatives, I am willing to conform. Duke, Cousin Helen, I told your adopted daughter, Miss Joy, this morning that I thought I could make her a good husband. I said to her: Would she have me? And she said: 'Ask the Duke.' Well, Sir, I do ask."

Of course, Favereau had known as well as all the others what was coming, yet from his shaded corner behind the Duke, Dodd's words struck him as with a blow. The second's pause that followed was awful to

him, and he thought he could almost feel in his own frame the agonised tension of his friend's nerves.

Madame de Lormes' rapid breathing betokened preparation for a fulminating indictment. But it was Helen who broke the silence. She placed her hand on the fair head at her knee.

"Before we say a word, George," she cried hastily, "I must know the child's feeling on the matter. We cannot dispose of her heart without hearing what it says."

Her voice was slightly rebuking; her cousin, she thought, should not have exposed the little one to such an ordeal.

"She herself authorised me to speak," said Dodd. "Did you not, Miss Joy?"

Quite unknown to himself, his tone had taken a beautiful inflection of tenderness as he addressed the girl. The crouching figure here rose to its knees, and Joy, turning, leaned her elbows on the Duchess' lap, propped her chin upon her hands, and fixed her eyes on the Duke. Then she said slowly, in her small, deliberate voice:

"I told him to ask the Duke."

A moment's silence, full of astonishment, came upon every one in the room, with the exception of the two who, alas! knew but too well now the solution to the enigma. Cluny felt the firelight flicker on his face, felt the gaze of general expectancy slowly turning upon him, felt, above all, the narrow gleam between Joy's half-closed lids. His soul was numb within him.

What was this trap she had so evidently laid for his fall? How could he so bear himself as best to spare Helen and his honour? The only emotion left to him was a horrible inclination to laugh. "*His honour!*"

Helen's sweet voice, a little troubled, rose again. "She is right," it said. "After all, it is Cluny who must approve or forbid. Cluny?"

The flapping of Madame de Lormes' indignant fan ceased; so did Totol's restless finger-cracking and half-suppressed sniggering. Even his small soul felt the undefinable coming of the hidden storm. Joy's intent watching face became transfigured as with some mysterious triumph. By her attitude, concealed now from the observation of her lover as well as of most of the others, her face, in the side glow of the fire, illumined also startlingly by an inner glow, was in fact then visible to Favereau only.

"What is she aiming at?" he asked himself in ever-increasing doubt. More than once he opened his mouth to interfere, and then, the old dread of provoking the catastrophe it was his purpose to try to avert prudently closed it again.

The Duke stood looking straight before him. Favereau glanced at his face; here too he felt he was standing upon unknown ground. Of the incorrigible Cluny, of Cluny the inconceivably light-minded, he had known every turn; every turn also of the weak, despairing sinner shrinking from fate; but this Cluny, wrapt in himself, cold and disdainful and apart, he did not know. He could not forecast

a single one of his actions. Here was no acting as in that first trial of strength with Joy just a week ago; here was now no cloak of comedy thrown over raw despair. This sudden and extraordinary quietude reached, Favereau felt, to the spirit; and this it was which made it seem so ghastly. "He looks like death!" thought Favereau, and fantastic shapes of fear began to flit in his overstrained mind. The strongest motive power of the Duke's life, he knew, was a certain fastidious, one-sided, and specious sense of personal honour, quite distinct from pride of race on the one hand or moral principle on the other. And now, by his own deed and by the fearful force of retributive coincidence, the man had been brought into a quagmire where, turn as he might, every step must plunge him into deeper infamy.

It seemed to Favereau as if he himself had struck the death-blow of his friend a few minutes ago by those words of desperate advice: "Let honour go!" as if with the death of Cluny's honour the soul of the man had died too, and this were now a mere ambulating corpse, moved by some unnatural power that was not of the spirit.

The suspense might have lasted about a minute. The contented smile had gradually disappeared from George Dodd's lips; his face had become set into massive gravity. When Madame de Lormes began to agitate her fan once more, this time with triumphant beat, he remarked very quietly:

"Whatever your objections are, Duke, had n't you better mention them?"

Helen put out a deprecating hand.

"Wait, George," she said. Then she turned towards her husband. "Cluny," she pleaded, "we must seem romantic, foolish people, and you must be quite surprised at this scene. But the fact is" — she hesitated — "the fact is, Aunt Harriet thinks ——" Again she broke off. "Dear Aunt Harriet, don't be angry with me; surely it is good to put aside conventions now and again ——"

Here Madame de Lormes gave an angry, contemptuous laugh, at the end of which she drew in her breath with a hissing sound. This with her was the heralding of that indignation that is beyond words. Helen knew the symptom well. Troubled, yet nevertheless courageous, she pursued:

"Dear, here are two, I think, that love each other. Am I right, Joy?"

She paused for a second. The elbows propped upon her lap trembled, but no word came from the girl's lips. Unwaveringly, as the cat watches the bird, Joy was watching her victim.

"Dear," then cried the Duchess, the unknown trouble that seemed to be closing around her giving a piteousness, almost a sharpness, to her accents that cut Favereau to the heart, "dear, shall we not make it easy for them to be as happy as we are? Cluny, in the name of our love ——" Her voice broke off; never before had she called upon him unanswered. The strangeness, the terror of his silence,

brought a sob to her throat, a mist to her eyes. Once more a heavy stillness fell upon them all.

Suddenly the girl sprang to her feet, and her shrill cry resounded and echoed through the vast dim room. It was a cry of delight, of victory:

"The Duke refuses his consent. He refuses!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

"UPON my word!" said Madame de Lormes. But nobody heeded her, for the Duke of Cluny was speaking at last.

Upon the hearth a couple of logs had fallen apart with a crash, and tongues of yellow flame were leaping up the chimney. Even in this rosy firelight-glow the face of the master of the house showed livid. Yet — terrible contrast! — it was smiling.

"You mistake, Mademoiselle. Why should I refuse my consent to your marriage? On the contrary, should I not be gratified at seeing your future so unexpectedly, so well, provided for?"

His accent was very quiet, the words perfectly well chosen and natural, yet every one, except Madame de Lormes, whose narrow brain was filled by her own absorbing grievances, felt that the something abnormal, the something terrible in the situation had become intensified.

Helen, fighting against her intangible fear, with all her sublime confidence in those she loved and all her passionate human instinct for happiness, became dimly conscious in her trouble that Joy, with the movement of some little wild animal, was crouching up against her once again. Then as one in a painful

dream she heard thin strangled tones, in which she could hardly recognise Joy's clear girlish voice:

"Say it again! Say you wish for this marriage."

It was her husband who was thus called upon!

"Joy!"

Helen cried out, as if she had been struck.

Cluny was still smiling. "Say it again?" he repeated. "Why, a hundred times if you will. It is naturally my wish to see you happily settled."

Favereau had already half risen, with hand outstretched, but could not stop the words. Some intuition of the strange workings of the girl's mind had flashed into his own. The miserable creature still loved her betrayer to this desperation; and Cluny . . . What devil possessed the man to answer her thus!

Now it had come!

There was a breathless pause: time just sufficient for the words to sink with their full meaning into Joy's heart. Then she was up like a fury, her hands in her hair — another Joy that none (not even Cluny) knew; the savage, passionate, girl-woman of the single idea, of the hopeless longing.

"Happily settled! Say married off, got rid of! . . . And what if I can now give no man the love he has the right to look for in his wife?"

"Child!"

But the shrill voice rose above Helen's exclamation.

"What if I had given my love, given it, once for all, and all else had been . . . taken from me!"

This cry of the naked soul, with its awful self-revelation, cast dismay in the room. Helen's arms were flung round the girl, her hand laid on the terrible lips.

"Hush, hush, my poor child! You cannot know what you are saying."

Around her own heart she felt the dark waters closing: that unknown sorrow she had always dreaded, she knew, as yet without reason, was upon her at last! True to the practice of her life, her single thought was for the one that seemed to need her help. But Joy struck at her, flung her touch away.

"Oh, leave me alone; your caresses have stifled me long enough!"

It was to Helen as if the first wave of the dark sea had broken over her; the taste of its unspeakable bitterness was upon her mouth.

Favereau came forward. One comprehensive glance took in Helen's stricken look, Joy's distorted face, Cluny's countenance of death, and the sailor's profile, set as into lines of granite. And hopelessly he resolved to make his last effort. It was a gallant one: he even laughed.

"May I suggest," he said, "that the young lady has been subjected to a very trying ordeal. She seems of a nervous temperament. She certainly does not know what she is saying. Helen, a glass of sal-volatile for Mademoiselle, and let Blanchette take her to her room."

Like a wildcat Joy turned on him. "You shall not stay my mouth again, you — you old liar!"

Helen stood still, after one glance at her husband.

"Quite hysterical," said Favereau, smilingly meeting the girl's onslaught.

George Dodd's figure now suddenly rose, square and large. He began to speak, in a tone of ominous gentleness.

"I beg your pardon, Sir; I can't agree with either the Duchess or you. Miss Joy seems to me to know remarkably well what she does mean, on the contrary. She has said too much, or too little, to stop now."

Here Favereau committed what he afterwards recognised as the irretrievable mistake of endeavouring to enlist the American on his side.

"For God's sake, Mr. Dodd!" he whispered in his ear, catching him at the same time by the hand with a pressure at once of warning and of appeal.

Mr. Dodd disengaged his fingers with great composure.

"Look here, Monsieur Favereau," he said almost genially, "I don't see where you come in, Sir. Just take my advice, sit down, and hold your tongue."

Poor Favereau forced out another laugh, hardly as successful as the first.

"Shame, Mr. Dodd," he cried. "What monstrous significance are you attaching to a schoolgirl's nonsense!" (Oh, he thought, if he could only get the women away, get Helen away at least, he could deal with the men.) And turning to the Duchess he cried, with the first impatience he had ever shown her: "For God's sake, Helen, take that

girl out of the room. Mr. Dodd must wait for his explanation."

The sailor's deliberate answer was forestalled by Joy herself.

"Mr. Dodd shall have his explanation now: As the love of another man, I refuse to become his wife."

Favereau threw up his hands and withdrew to stand beside Cluny. The latter slowly folded his arms. The unnatural smile had left his face: something of the old sweet look had come back to it. He gave one glance at his friend, and in it Favereau read the cry of his own heart: "*All is over!*"

Helen caught the back of a chair to keep herself from falling. But Joy, by her side, stood very erect. Dodd advanced two steps and took the girl's wrist gently between his finger and thumb.

"Just repeat that, Miss Joy," he said. "Another man's love?"

If his voice was cold, it still had the usual gentleness of its inflection when addressing her. She flung back her head and looked at him full. A marked change broke for a second the placidity of his features, for one instant horror leaped into his eyes. Then he dropped her hand and drew back quietly.

The thin barrier which had kept Joy's passion from absolutely riding over her self-control now snapped. She broke into a shriek:

"His love? . . . His slave! I'd have been his slave all my life! For a word, for a look, I'd be his slave still!"

She clasped her hands to her heart and swayed as she drove the words at Cluny, her eyes straining across the dusk which the falling flame had left in the room towards his motionless, rigid figure. "One look, one sign!" she repeated, and paused, breathless. The flame leaped up again, Cluny's face appeared with compressed lips and downcast eyes for a second against the gloom. Then in the darkness Joy gave a cry.

It was the cry of a creature wounded to death.

Indistinctly Favereau's figure was seen to advance, but instantly the American's voice struck in like a knife.

"Monsieur Favereau," he said, "if you offer to say another word I 'll knock you down."

There fell another terrible pause — the pause between the lightning and the crash — into this the sailor dropped two more words:

"His name?"

"Turn on the light!" called Joy, in a clear, high voice.

CHAPTER XXXV

GEORGE DODD sprang to the switch: light flooded the room. Helen had covered her eyes with her hands. Cluny's attitude had not changed. Joy shot forth a pointing finger, the devil of love turned to hate glaring phosphorescent out of her eyes.

"Look at him!" she said briefly.

Mr. Dodd looked. "Aha!" said he. That was all.

"Don't you see the girl's mad!" cried Favereau, in loud, angry tones.

"Mad! Am I?" *And she had been afraid of this man!* "Yes, I was mad. I am mad still, if you call that madness. I shall be mad till I die. Oh, a month ago I was sane, a month ago I was honest, a month ago ——" The slender arms were flung out with a gesture of unconscious pathos towards Helen. "A month ago I was almost what she believed me. I was innocent, I was innocent — innocent enough at least to believe that when a man offered caresses and kisses it meant that he loved; innocent enough to think that love meant happiness; innocent enough to think that for every girl there was a man, some-

where, ready to give her his love; that she had only to look around the world to meet him! Oh!" With tearing, claw-like fingers, she clutched at the masses of her yellow hair and drew them back. Her little face, thus exposed to the brilliant light, was marked with haggard lines of fury that robbed it of all youth. "Oh," she went on, drawing fresh breath with a sobbing gasp, "I met the man whom I thought was to be my own? Oh, you know him, all of you! Do you think I had a chance against him? I gave my love — all! And what did he give me? What did he give me?" she repeated and broke into wild laughter, catching at her throat with frenzied hands, and the next moment the pearls fell in a milk-white hail from her outflung hands and bounded and rolled in every direction on the polished floor — "a necklace of pearls!"

Then stillness for one hideous half-minute. A gasping sob came from Madame de Lormes, a sudden deep breath from the American. The others seemed held as by a spell. And Helen stood as before, with hidden eyes.

Joy gathered her failing physical strength together to hurl forth to the uttermost her love, her passion, her despair, her vengeance.

"I gave him such love! She" — pointing a contemptuous finger at her benefactress — "she can prate of her love for him, she the cold saint, who would not as much as dip the tip of her finger into sin for his sake. I — I 'd have lied, I 'd have betrayed the whole world, I 'd have sinned and sinned and died a

thousand deaths for another single kiss, for one of his old looks. I 'd have done anything he wished, if he had chosen. But now, now, oh this awful madness that he has left in my soul! He has nailed his love to my heart. Oh, God!" she screamed, as if in actual physical pain, and stopped, breathless, panting.

The American's voice, with its unnatural everyday tone, was now uplifted:

"Well, you Duke of Cluny, what have you got to say?"

"Aye, speak," cried Joy, again, exhausted, yet still horribly upheld by the strength of her rage. "Speak, Duke of Cluny, alias Monsieur le Chevalier. Defend yourself — deny. It is a chance resemblance, is it not?" Livid laughter writhed upon her lips. "The Duke of Cluny never met, never could have met the nameless Joy before! Or if Monsieur le Chevalier did, what of it! A moment's amusement, a whim, a pastime for a dull hour. The toy is broken, throw it away!"

Her voice suddenly failed; she flung herself face forward on the cushions of the divan. With short, light steps, head craned forward, strong lower jaw slightly shot out, blue eyes extraordinarily pale and luminous, their pupils contracted to a pin's point, George Dodd advanced upon Cluny.

The Duke stood in the same attitude, his eyes upon the ground; but at the sailor's approach he raised them and looked steadily at the threatening face.

"Well, Sir?" said Mr. Dodd. "What have you got to say?"

Very gently, very wearily, Cluny answered: "Nothing."

"Do you deny everything, then?"

"I deny nothing."

The American stood still a moment in the same poised attitude of instant menace. He shifted now tigerish eyes to the white figure prone on the sofa, and his heart contracted and the blood surged fiercely to his brain. The pathos of his pretty dream shattered into this mire wrought upon him brief madness: he looked back again at the Duke and saw the world red.

"Bastard Stuart as you are . . . would you palm off your discarded mistress upon me!"

As he spat the words at Cluny he raised his hand and struck him on the cheek.

And Cluny stood motionless; stood facing the man he had so deeply yet so unwittingly injured, with patient eyes.

In the rush, the uproar, the sudden clamour of voices, Helen still kept erect for one wonderful moment of endurance. Then the bitter waters closed above her head. She gave a great cry:

"Oh, I am falling, falling, falling!"

And Favereau, springing forward, caught the stricken figure in his arms.

BOOK IV

"*Hatred stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins.*" — PROVERBS.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN the best guest-chamber of the only inn at St. Michel, at the sign of the *Tourne-Bride*, Lieutenant George Dodd sat writing at a small deal table.

It was just an hour since, in the airy, comfortable room at Luciennes so hospitably prepared to his tastes by his kinswoman's delicate and gracious solicitude but a week ago, he had with his own hands gathered his belongings together, the while maturing his course of action. This hour he had so well employed that there now remained to him but a few business letters to write before descending to partake of that improvised dinner (ordered for three), thereafter to turn in early. For he proposed to rise at a proportionately unusual hour: and he had his reasons for desiring to be particularly fit.

Two yellow candles on his table illumined the steady writing and threw flickering lights and shades on the sordid little room, on the blue and grey flock paper of laboriously hideous design, on the flaring coloured lithographs of Sobieski's last leap and Mazeppa's classic predicament, on the walnut-wood

bedstead that looked so much too short, on the muslin curtain, blue-white, stiff, and darned.

George Dodd signed his fourth and final letter with his bold black scrawl, read it carefully over, folded and sealed it in the envelope already addressed, according to his methodical business habit. Even as he was withdrawing the seal from the soft wax there came a knock at the door. He turned round upon his chair.

"Come in," cried he, in French, and tossed the letter on to the little pile.

The door was opened and Favereau entered.

The American looked coldly, without rising. "Is not this to be considered rather irregular?" he asked. "As I informed the Duke of Cluny, my friends would be ready to receive his" — he lifted his great gold watch and consulted it — "to be quite precise, at a quarter to ten to-night. It is not yet nine o'clock. I am, as you know, Sir," he went on, "a stranger in your country and I am anxious to conform to your own special rules of honour." His lips were twisted into a contemptuous smile. "You tell me that my slap on his face gives the Duke the right to demand satisfaction of me" — here the smile became a hollow laugh — "I reply: I am anxious to give the Duke this satisfaction. In my country, Sir, he should have had his satisfaction within the half-hour without so much of this quadrille business. But so long as I can give your Duke his satisfaction, you know ——" He struck the table a dry knock with his knuckles and laughed again.

Favereau, who had carefully closed the door behind him, stood, his head a little bent, listening with an air of profound attention. His face was yellow-white and lined with two deep furrows running from the edge of his nostrils into his beard. He did not answer; and the sailor after a pause began afresh, the jeering note in his voice still more pronounced:

"You can tell that noble Duke of yours that I am quite at his disposal. My friends" — here he gave a fillip to two blue telegraph slips that lay opened, one over the other, beside him — "my friends will bring what is necessary. One of them has lived a long time in Paris; I am certain he is up to your ways. Personally, I have insisted only on two conditions — not later than to-morrow morning, and pistols." He halted emphatically; then adding with a sort of mockery of politeness: "Mr. Favereau, I have the honour to wish you good-evening," turned once more to the writing-table.

Favereau, however, advanced a few steps into the room.

"Mr. Dodd," he said very gently, "may I request you to listen to me patiently for a few moments?"

"It seems to me," answered the other, tossing his papers about angrily as he spoke, "that everything has been said that is worth saying."

"No, Sir." Favereau came quite up to the table. He leaned his long white fingers on it, and peered with his troubled, shortsighted eyes earnestly down at the inflexible young face. "Mr. Dodd, you are

very justly incensed. You have been very gravely injured. But allow me to represent to you that your vengeance is directed against the wrong man. For the personal injury to yourself, for that silence which you may very well characterise as infamous, I alone am responsible."

The sailor raised his blue eyes, hard as steel, to the elder man's countenance.

"Am I to understand," said he, "that you have come to me as the bearer of the Duke of Cluny's apologies?"

Favereau threw back his head and his cheek coloured as if he had received a blow.

"No," he answered briefly; and the extended fingers were suddenly clenched.

The American's eyelids narrowed. "May I ask, at least," said he, "if the Duke is aware of this 'tween-time visit of yours?"

The quick flush faded from Favereau's face as quickly as it had risen. He looked at George Dodd without a word. A deeper tint crept likewise into the sailor's cheek, mounted to the temples where it left an angry red.

"Well, Sir," he exclaimed impatiently, "will you then kindly explain what your business is here to-night?"

"My business!" echoed Favereau; he hesitated a second, then he went on resolutely, though his voice shook: "I have but just mentioned it to you. It is to make you understand that it is I who have been the cause of your present humiliating situation: and

that therefore it is myself whom you should meet to-morrow morning."

"Ha!" commented Lieutenant Dodd. The veins on his temples had begun to swell. "And what about that slap on the cheek, Sir? If I shoot you, will your Duke's honour be satisfied?" As he stopped, lingering upon the sneer, his coldly measuring eyes caught a sudden vindictive spasm upon the worn features of the Minister of France. Instantly his whole form was again shaken by mocking laughter. "Oh, oh! I see, Sir, I see! The Duke has certainly got a useful friend in you. Now, look here, Mr. Favereau" — he laid his broad brown hands upon the table with all the weight of his resentment — "I 'm quite of your opinion, so far: you ought to be shot, Sir, quite as much as that Duke of yours. Perhaps more! But, for all that, I am not going to stand up to you and give you the chance of putting me out of the way before I have rid your country of that — that carrion. No, Sir." He rose, mighty: physically enormous, morally irresistible, in his anger. "And, moreover, Mr. Favereau, when I *have* discharged that duty to society, I will not fight you." Favereau's uplifted hand fell. "You may live, Sir, in your shame, because of those white hairs."

Favereau drew his breath with a deep hissing sound. For an instant, in despite of his white hairs, there leaped in him a passion so young and strong that he felt he had it in the power of his hands to strangle the life out of that insulting throat. The next moment (and then it was that all youth died in

him for ever: thenceforward he was as an old man) his heat fell from him like a mantle and the cold hopelessness of age enveloped him.

Why should he rebel? How might he presume to be angry? It was true, his hair was white and he was shamed.

"Go!" said the American, and pointed to the door with swift and rigid arm.

With bowed head, Jacques Favereau moved away. But with his hand to the door he paused and turned round.

"Mr. Dodd," said he, and though he spoke with humility, not knowing that never at the height of his greatest triumphs had he shown a truer dignity, "have you given one thought in all this to Helen?"

"Have I given one thought to Helen!" ejaculated the other, and the sullen storm of his rage broke into fluent words at last. "You do well to come and say this to me! Pray, Sir, when that infamous friend of yours betrayed his unhappy wife, did he give one thought — to Helen? When he received under his own roof the . . . girl he had seduced, and lived between wife and mistress, did he give one thought — to Helen? When you and he plotted to marry the poor little soiled creature off to me, to Helen's own cousin, to the silly simple sailor, did you give one thought — to Helen? Sir, what have been your own motives I know not: the fellow-feeling of the old *viveur*, or, God knows — I don't want to — what other hidden purpose may have moved you, incomprehensible to clean-minded men like me. Whatever

it may have been, ask yourself before you come whining to me: *Have you thought of Helen?*"

He wrested the door from the other's clasp and flung it open. And before his gesture Favereau passed out. On the threshold the most respected man in France turned and looked full at him against whom he seemed, by his own avowal, to have plotted infamy. It was the look of a soul too disdainful, too high, for self-exculpation in the midst of illimitable sadness.

The sailor closed the door and came back to his table, haunted by that look.

"The old devil!" he growled savagely between his teeth. "How dare he look at me with the eyes of an honest man!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

LIEUTENANT DODD walked up to the window, flung open the two casements, and inhaled deeply.

A still night, held with the first frosts. The dome of the remote heaven wondrously star-spangled. The autumn moon, heavy, lustrous, low-sailing in matronly dignity. The world, where not inky black, striped and tipped with silver; silver-tipped spire above the humpback little black church of St. Michel; silver-striped road and black sentinel poplars with the gleam of a leaf here and there like the hint of a spear-head; rounded shapes of wooded hills, mysteriously dark, capriciously plashed with light; black, beautiful upspring of the dead aqueduct reared against the serene sky with the sparkle of stars through its silent arches — that was what met his unseeing, angry eyes.

Well might one, looking on such a scene and feeling its deep peace steal into his soul, have cried with the Canon of Marly: "Beautiful France!" But this alien, as he gazed, struck the rotting window-ledge with his strong fist and cried in his indignant heart: "Accursed land!"

From below a clink of glass and a wrangle of coarse, dull French voices rose faintly to the ear. Presently out of the sweet distant stillness a growing rumble of carriage wheels came into being and grew. The beat of eight iron shoes measured a rhythmic tune on the hard road. And all of a sudden:

"That 's from Luciennes," thought Lieutenant Dodd.

. . . . . .

The Marquise de Lormes came up the narrow painted wooden stairs, her hand on Totol's shoulder, pausing to sigh at every third step.

Her elder son met her on the threshold of his room. Nothing perhaps could have been more profoundly irritating to him than the appearance of his relative at this moment.

After a fashion pathetically different from her usual self-controlled majesty, the lady tottered to her chair and loosened the folds of the vast black circular dust-cloak in which she was enveloped. Over a penitential bonnet an immense veil of black gauze had been tied under her chin.

"Close the door, Anatole," she said in an unusually softened tone. And Totol, more like a small man-monkey than ever, his face wrinkled with perturbation and worldly wisdom, silently obeyed.

Dodd, unconsciously a little moved at the sight of a stateliness so broken, came over and touched gently the poor lady's hand.

"My dear Mother," he said, "believe me, you can do no good here. Pray let me bring you back to

the carriage without any further words, words which can only be painful to both of us."

Madame de Lormes slowly turned upon him eyes which had shed many tears since he had last come under their usually reproving glance.

"George," she answered faintly, "we must do our duty." Here the corners of her lips began to quiver and water welled up again to the empurpled eyelids. She made a gesture towards the little Marquis, and pressed against her mouth the damp folds of her handkerchief. Anatole, on his side, cleared his throat.

"The poor *Maman* is very much upset," said he. "So am I. So is everybody. Rotten business altogether! But see here, old man. You 're well out of it, ain't you? All 's well that ends well. Drop it, won't you?"

"Drop what?" said the sailor, shortly.

"Why ——" The Marquis closed three fingers of his right hand and, extending the index and elevating the thumb, pointed the anatomical arrangement at his brother's heart, one eye screwed up, the other nicely adjusted to an aim. Then he gave one significant cluck of the tongue, dropped the mimic pistol hand, and shook his head gravely from side to side: "It won't do, George, it won't do."

George Dodd sat down on the wooden bedstead, swung his legs, and began to whistle "The Washington Post" under his breath. After a minute's silence, broken only by Madame de Lormes' sighs, he looked at her and said with assumed cheerfulness:

"You 'll just say when you feel rested enough to go down to the carriage, Ma'am." Then he resumed his tune exactly where he had left it off.

Totol stood, reflectively frowning, his thumbs inserted into the armholes of his waistcoat. All at once he burst into fresh eloquence:

"What we 've got to show here, George, is tact. Tact, my good fellow. Look at me. I have agreed to be one of Charles-Edward's seconds, old Favereau the other second. Why? To keep the affair as much as possible in the family, of course. But hang it all — why fight at all? A little tact, George, my boy!"

His mother suspended her quivering breath to hang upon the sailor's reply. The latter had ceased whistling, and with his eyes on the ground seemed to be lost in profound reflection. At last, looking up, he said with a slight smile:

"Well, now, really I 'd rather like to know what 's your idea of tact in this matter."

Totol's face creased itself into different folds, now betokening a smile.

"It is n't so easy, you see," he said. "I 've had to think devilish hard, but I 've got it all straight now." He sidled over to the bed and laid a bony forefinger impressively on his brother's arm.

"You 've just got to pack your traps and make for America to-night." He drew back his finger and the upper part of his body and smiled more broadly. "See? You 're an American: no need for you to fight duels. See? And after your — er." Totol

here had once more recourse to mimicry, screwed up one side of his face, struck it gently with his hand, and nodded. "After that, you know, it would n't look well for you to remain in the same country with Cluny. On the other hand, if you are gone, don't you know, our Charles-Edward cannot fight you. How could he? So the matter ends there, as it began — *en famille*, no one the wiser. Things remain bad enough, but they don't grow worse. See?"

"Oh," responded the other, blandly. "Yes, I think I see." Then he slid off the bed, took Totol by the elbow and marched him carefully towards the door. "You 're a mighty humourous young man," he remarked, and opened the door. "Good-night. Go to bed. You 've got to get up early, you know."

"Oh, I say," cried Totol, falling dismally from his height of self-satisfaction. "Eh, *Maman*, that means he won't!"

Madame de Lormes rose suddenly from her chair. She approached the sailor, clasping her hands.

"George," she cried, "I beg of you, reflect. It is a deadly sin to try and take the life of another."

"I 'll not be afraid, Ma'am," answered Lieutenant Dodd, gravely, "when I stand up for judgment, if I 've nothing worse on my soul than the killing of the Duc de Cluny."

A moan escaped the old lady's lips. The tears began to stream down her cheeks.

"I implore you," she again cried, "for the sake of my unhappy niece, for the sake of Helen!"

The sailor's face became set into marble. "It is not I, Ma'am, who have made Helen an unhappy woman. The thing is already done, I take it."

"Have mercy!"

"As much mercy as I should have on a mad dog!"

"Fie, fie!" said Totol from the landing, pushing the door open and coming in again. He slipped his little thin arm round his mother's massive figure, looking the while reproachfully at his brother. "That 's not nice of you, George, not nice at all! Never mind, *Maman*," he added naïvely, "Cluny has a chance too, you know."

Madame de Lormes shook her head miserably, and a bent, doleful figure passed out of the inn room with dragging steps. But at the head of the stairs she turned and caught the hand of the sailor.

"My son," she pleaded, "will you not listen to your mother?"

The American smiled with some bitterness. "You see, Madam," said he, "when you speak of my mother you are speaking of a person whom the late Septimus P. Dodd's son was never allowed to know. I should be mightily flattered could I feel that all this anxiety concerned in any way the insignificant personality of the Lieutenant George P. Dodd aforesaid. But I imagine the condescension of the noble Marquise de Lormes (whose acquaintance I have been privileged to make a week ago) could hardly reach so low."

With fluttering, palsied movements, Madame de

Lormes gathered the folds of her cloak about her and pulled the black gauze over her discomposed countenance.

"Won't you take my arm?" asked George. But she motioned him from her with anger.

"Come with me, poor *Maman*," said Totol, soothingly. And, rolling one last look of deep reprobation on his brother, he proceeded on the gallant task of conveying his mother's tottering frame downstairs.

With a cold smile the elder son followed in rear.

At the door of the inn a cab had just deposited two new-comers. They took off their hats gravely, and displayed clean-cut, vigorous, unmistakably Anglo-Saxon features.

"I have ordered supper and your rooms," said Dodd over his shoulder, as he went by them in pursuance of his unaccepted filial duty. "I shall be with you in a moment."

"A heart of stone!" groaned the Marquise as she sank back in the carriage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE still night had faded and pulsed into the grey of dawn. Through the open curtains of Helen's own sitting-room the first luminous pallor of returning day had begun to bleach the windows. The white-tapestried room was dim in the contending shades of night and day. The two candles in the silver sconces burned dim orange in colour, the hitherto steady flame in the red lamp hanging in the alcove oratory had begun to rise and fall with the failing of the oil.

The hour of dawn, to so many the hour of death, to all the hour of cold, of mystery, of vague apprehension . . . the Duke of Cluny felt the chill of it into his very marrow!

He rose stiffly from the hearth, where the last vital spark had died, buried under the white ash; where, seated the long night through, gazing at the dwindling fire, he had thought back the thoughts of a lifetime.

He went over to the window and noiselessly, with endless care, undid the casements and pushed them open.

White mist hung over the garden, hiding terrace slopes and park alleys. Its faint, sickly breath rose

to his nostrils, struck his cheek, and left its clammy touch upon it.

"It is the dawn," said the man under his breath. "It is the dawn. How cold!"

He came forward into the room again, halted by Helen's door, and with bent head listened.

A bell from some clock without struck the half-hour. Cluny looked at his watch: it was half-past five. Slowly spread the dawn, ever more bleakly white.

The door upon the passage opened upon a cautious hand, and Favereau entered. Cluny looked at him in silence. *How old he was growing, poor old Favereau!*

The two men met in the middle of the room.

"It is time, Edward," said Favereau, in a low voice.

Answered Cluny in the same tone: "I am ready."

After a second's hesitation Favereau laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Have you seen Helen?" he asked.

The other turned his face with the nobility of mortal agony bravely supported stamped upon it.

"No. I have listened at her door all night. There has been no sound from her. Blanchette is there. Helen seems to be able to bear her presence — it is no more obtrusive than that of a faithful dog — no one else's. Since she recovered consciousness she has said but four words: 'Let me be alone!'"

"It is better so," said Favereau, with a twitching lip.

And meekly Cluny repeated: "Yes, it is better so."

The two spoke as men speak in a death-chamber, in voices subdued to the lowest pitch.

A tiny pallid shaft of light suddenly pierced into the room. Favereau pointed to it with significant gesture.

"I know," said Cluny. "I know." He turned to his wife's door again, leaned his forehead against it, and folded his hands for a moment in prayer. Not for himself — how could such as he pray for themselves? — but for her, that she might find strength to bear it all. Then he came back to Favereau.

"I am ready," he said quietly.

Favereau, turning to go with him, suddenly stopped himself and caught him by the arm.

"Ready!" he exclaimed in a fierce whisper, and ran his eye indignantly over his friend's figure. "Not with that coat, man!" He tapped with his finger the light summer grey coat and the white expanse of shirt front. "You want to turn yourself into a target for that fellow's ball?"

Cluny withdrew himself from his touch and smiled upon him placidly, remotely.

"My dear Favereau, what else?"

The Minister stared a second, then cast down his eyes to hide a rush of weak, angry tears.

"And your hand," he went on huskily, "after sitting up all night?"

The Duke held out his slender hand and looked at it.

"Quite steady enough," said he, "for my purpose."

But Favereau gripped him by the elbow. "For your purpose! That means, Edward ——" His voice broke. "I did not bargain to stand by and see murder done upon you."

"Not murder — justice."

Favereau's head fell upon his breast. Once more he moved to the door, once more he stopped.

"I have ordered," he said, "some coffee for you. You will drink that." His eyes were pleading.

Cluny, who, with brow held aloft and abstracted gaze, had reached the threshold, seemed to bring himself back with an effort from his far thoughts as he turned to answer him.

"Thanks, old friend." His voice had something of its old natural note instead of the toneless whisper in which he had hitherto spoken. "To please you I would drink it, that or anything else, and pledge our friendship a last time. But" — again his eyes became fixed on unearthly distance — "I want to go fasting to this new sacrament."

"This new sacrament?"

"The sacrament of death," said Cluny.

Favereau stared at him. He had loved Cluny all his life, in his beautiful adolescence and his foolish manhood, and loved him, rebuking, disapproving without hope, without respect. And had he known him so little? This, then, was the real Cluny, the "better self" that Helen loved! He was going to his death like the son of a king. Yesterday it had seemed to him, in some horrible way, as if his friend's soul were already dead and only the body left

living. Now, on his way to that bodily dissolution which they both instinctively felt was awaiting him, Cluny's soul so dominated his mere humanity that it was as if already freed from its gross earthly ties, already spreading its wings for a flight.

"Do you think she would have forgiven — if I had lived?" said Cluny, without looking at his friend.

So completely had he already expired to himself that it was quite unconsciously he spoke of himself as a thing of the past when he whispered the question.

Profoundly startled, profoundly troubled, Favereau stammered miserably, could find no words.

Cluny gave a deep sigh.

"Let us go," said he.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HER "Missie" was asleep. Blanchette had sung Helen to slumber at last, as in those never-forgotten days of yore when her foster babe lay upon her faithful bosom.

The mulatto rose noiselessly from her seat by the bed and, without hushing the soft crooning song that had not been silent on her lips the whole night through, bent to look as well as she could in the dim light of the night lamp.

Helen's breath came in regular sweeps; one long lovely hand lay relaxed on the sheet; under the shadow of her heavy hair the peace of sleep which is next to the peace of death had at last settled on the wan face.

Still crooning, Blanchette drew back, crossed the room on tiptoe, opened the door noiselessly, and, leaving it a hair's breadth ajar, crept into the sitting-room, her song a little louder now lest the sleeper should wake for the sudden want of her lullaby.

> "Old Missie act the foolest part,
> And died for a man that broke her heart,
> Look away, look away, away."

Thus went the wailing tune, in the pathetic negro voice, breaking off, now into a sort of trail of sub-

dued sound, now into a long yawn, as the dusky creature moved about the room in her dumb list-shoes. She lit the spirit lamp on Helen's untouched tea-tray of the night before, intent on making a refreshing cup for her mistress against a possible early waking.

"Look away, look away, away,"

sang Blanchette, and stretched herself and yawned.

Misty sunshine was now flooding in in horizontal sheets through the open window. She caught sight of the candles still flaring in their sockets and arrested her song to blow them out.

At the same instant the far-off crack of two shots, almost simultaneous, rang from some glade in the park below. Blanchette listened for a moment indifferently, then took up her monotonous chant once more:

"Then I wish I was in Dixie . . .
Hurray, hurray, hurray!"

The passage door creaked and opened. Madame Rodriguez, wrapped in a dressing-gown, her little face drawn and ashen-coloured, crept shivering into the room.

"My!" she cried, breaking into a run. "I am glad to see a human face if it is only a coloured one! Blanchette, woman, I'm frightened; I never was so frightened in all my life!"

Blanchette had stared at the new-comer open-mouthed. But when the voice was raised she disengaged her hand to clap it unceremoniously over the speaker's lips.

"Hush, hush, hush, you wake Missie! She only just gone off in de lobliest sound sleep!"

Nessie started. With a nod she advanced on tiptoe to Helen's door, listened for a moment, then, again nodding at Blanchette, closed it with such infinite care that not even a click was heard; then she ran back.

"Did you hear those shots?" she whispered.

Blanchette was peering into the kettle. "Reckon that keeper fellow popping round. Hope he not go for to wake my Missie."

Nessie seized her with cold fingers. "Where is the Duke?"

Blanchette lowered the kettle lid to stare again with round eyes.

"Lor a'mussy! I dunno, Ma'am Rodriguez." Her dark face became filled with the pitiful, uncomprehending trouble of a child. "Sho' dis has been de strangest night!"

Restlessly Madame Rodriguez went to the window and leaned out; restlessly she came back, sat down by the table, her hands catching at the loose masses of her hair.

"Oh, those shots, those shots!" She sprang to her feet, her face suddenly livid. "Blanchette, something has happened! My God, and Helen is asleep!"

The woman turned upon her fiercely. "Don't wake my Missie!"

"No, no," cried Nessie, in a sort of sobbing whisper. "God help her, let her sleep! Hush!

Don't you hear?" Once more she gripped Blanchette by the wrist. "Don't you hear? They're coming back!"

The healthy copper colour of the mulatto's cheek turned suddenly grey. Infected by the other's fears, she stood frozen, striving to catch the approaching sound of the unknown calamity. There was indeed a murmur of voices on the terrace path and a curious, steady, muffled tramp of feet. Then silence.

Still clutching each other the women listened. Now there came a step upon the stairs. Now it was coming down the passage. The door was opened, Favereau entered.

One look at his face was enough for Nessie: she staggered forward with a husky cry.

"Oh, Monsieur Favereau, the Duke!"

Favereau lifted his hand and let it fall without a word. Nessie covered her face. But Favereau had come up to her and was now speaking rapidly, earnestly:

"He has asked to be brought here. Here, do you understand me? Lebel is doing what he can, but it is only a question of minutes. . . . Madame Rodriguez, are you listening? Some one must prepare Helen."

Here Blanchette thrust her large, grey, bewildered face between them, with but one thing clear in her child-like brain:

"Missie asleep!"

"There is no time to lose," insisted Favereau. "The minutes . . ." — a spasm contracted his face,

his voice broke, but he went on: "the minutes are counted. Madame Rodriguez, you are her friend — will you tell Helen?"

She beat him off with frantic little hands. "I? Oh, I could n't do it! Monsieur Favereau, I could n't do it. Don't ask me!"

Favereau looked at her, cowering and fluttering, with angry, despairing eyes.

"Her aunt, then. Where is she?" he urged.

At that moment Madame de Lormes in person answered the question. Still in the clothes of the previous evening, she entered, stately, erect, her large features set like a mask of yellow wax.

"Madame," said Favereau, turning upon her, "you have heard?"

The old lady trembled, yet stood with uplifted head.

"My son?"

"No." Again the bitter spasm distorted Favereau's face. "The Duke . . . he shot in the air. Your son's bullet was aimed but too well."

Madame de Lormes seemed to break to pieces. She fell into a chair, covering her countenance with the folds of her lace veil. Nessie flew to her, sobbing.

"No, it 's the Duke, the poor dear beautiful Duke, and Helen 's asleep, in there, and she 's got to be told, and you 've got to do it!" She shook Madame de Lormes vehemently by the elbow. "You 've got to do it; you 've got to tell her, I tell you. There 's not a moment to lose."

Favereau bent down on the other side. "Madame Rodriguez is right," he urged, "there is not a moment to lose if Helen is to say good-bye to her husband."

The Marquise gathered herself together, and suddenly rising, faced them in majesty and anger.

"And you expect me to be the one to tell my unhappy niece that my son has killed her husband?"

A long cry broke from Blanchette. She clapped her hands together.

"Massa killed! Massa we loved so, our good, lovely massa!"

All rushed to silence her, too late! Helen's voice from the inner room was heard calling:

"Blanchette!"

Had those gentle accents been the trump of doom they could not have struck greater consternation. Nessie burst into uncontrolled sobs and fled. Madame de Lormes, again veiling her face with the dignified gesture of a Roman matron, passed out in her wake.

Favereau stood a second in a mortal hesitancy. Then, crying to the old nurse: "Keep her quiet a moment, I'll send the Doctor — better still the Canon; he must be here by this," he too took his coward's flight.

"O Christ in heaven!" exclaimed the poor mulatto, again striking her palms together. "What shall I say to Missie!"

Once more came the voice from within in louder cadence:

"Blanchette!"

CHAPTER XL

THE folds of her white morning wrapper falling in long statuesque lines about her, Helen advanced wearily into the room.

"Is it only you, Blanchette?" she asked. "I thought I heard voices." She let herself fall into a chair as she spoke and leant her brow on both hands. Then without looking up she added: "Tell your master that I want to see him."

A deep sigh escaped her lips. Within her her heart was crying out: *The whole night has passed, the sun has already risen, and he does not yet know that I have forgiven!*

Her temples throbbed. Shattered by the mental shock, there was but one idea dominant amid the whirling sadness of her thoughts: that Cluny must be in sore trouble, that he needed her.

All at once she became aware that her order was not being obeyed.

"Blanchette," she repeated, "did you not hear? Go and fetch your master."

The woman uttered a loud sobbing wail, and coming behind her mistress caught her head in her arms.

"Oh, Missie! Honey Missie, lie on poor old black Mammy's bosom as you used to! Oh Lordy, Lordy, dat it should be me to break her heart!"

All her vigour of mind and body came back to Helen at this hint of new calamity. She sprang to her feet.

"What! What! Your master? Blanchette, what is it? Speak, I order you!"

"Massa 's some hurt, Missie," sobbed the nurse. "Massa and the Captain they go shooting I spect . . . and oh, Lordy woe de day!"

She fell upon her knees and hid her poor convulsed countenance in the folds of the Duchess' robes. Helen stood still a second, rigid; then she gave a rending cry:

"Ah, and I was asleep! Where is he?"

Fiercely she fought against the clinging, loving hands that caught round her knees. She had broken from their hold and was rushing forward when she saw Dr. Lebel before her.

He was standing, looking at her, his spectacles pushed up high on his frowning forehead; with finger and thumb he was wringing his nether lip.

"Doctor — Cluny?" The question died away on her lips as her eyes fell upon his face. "Oh, is it as bad as that — is it as bad as that!"

She reeled and he caught her.

"For God's sake," he cried, "don't give way now; he wants you."

"He wants me." She steadied herself. "No, I shall not give way now. Don't be afraid. I am strong."

The Doctor peered at her keenly. "That 's right, that 's a brave woman! They are bringing him here. Keep up; it won't be for long."

He hurried out of the room and left her standing. With eyes fixed straight before her upon a vision of immeasurable sorrow, slowly she repeated:

"It won't be for long."

They were carrying him in. The majordomo, with the difficult tears of age streaming down his face, at the head; Jean, sobbing out loud, at the feet. They had laid him on a stretcher roughly made out of a hurdle covered with cloaks; under his head they had placed a cushion of purple silk, and over the long, still limbs they had lightly thrown a purple plush rug. His eyes were closed, his face with the stamp of death upon it was serene. They gently set him down at Helen's feet.

The Doctor stood gazing at him for a second; then he motioned the servants away, looked at Helen again searchingly, then drew back into the window recess.

Blanchette had crouched into a corner and was rocking herself, moaning under her breath, her dog-like gaze fixed upon her mistress. The misty day had brightened into glory, and sunshine was now streaming in upon them.

Cluny opened his eyes: "Helen."

Helen slowly fell on her knees by his side: "My beloved!"

"I can't lift my hand, Helen. Will you take it — the hand with the wedding ring."

His voice was very faint, but he spoke naturally, simply. She took his hand between both hers. With difficulty he moved his head a little nearer to her.

"Are you holding my hand, Helen?"

"Yes, Cluny."

"My wife!" These words he said very clearly, almost loudly, and then there was a pause. "Where am I to begin?" he went on, a look of trouble gathering upon his face. "I don't know — and the end is so soon!"

Her love brooded over him like the mother bird's over its young. As if speaking to a little child:

"I know everything you want to say," she cried; "say nothing."

His voice grew fainter, his eye dim. "And I who would have given my life to save you a tear — I have no words. Forgive."

Helen answered back to him: "I love you!"

He went on, ever more faintly: "It is right as it is — death expiates. What do you say? I cannot hear."

Closer she bent to him, laid her cheek on the pillow beside him.

"I love you!"

"There must be mercy with the God who made you."

He spoke wanderingly, his eyes feebly seeking some distant vision.

The Duchess rose to her feet. "He is faint," she exclaimed with a sharp cry. "Doctor, give him something, quick!"

Lebel hurried over, stooped down, raised himself again, and shook his head.

"Give him something!" repeated Helen, fiercely.

The Doctor patted her shoulder. "Keep up, child, keep up — a very little while longer."

"It is the end!" said Cluny. His voice rose with sudden strength. "Let me be brought into your room. And let us be alone. Let me be alone — alone with you and God. Helen, you have always done everything for me: offer up my soul; I am going."

The Doctor ran out to call in the waiting servants. Helen herself opened the great folding doors between the two rooms. She came back and again took up her husband's inert hand, just as, under Lebel's directions, the servants were lifting the stretcher. With a supreme effort Cluny turned his head to look at her with eyes growing rapidly blind.

"Your room," he whispered. "Ah, Helen, it is all over!"

"Don't touch him!" ordered Lebel. "Lay the stretcher on the bed. There, there."

The servants filed out; the Doctor followed them, closing the doors with care behind him. His hand was still on the lock when in rushed the Canon, his white hair disordered, in full vestments. Lebel hurried up to him.

Breathlessly the priest spoke: "I was in the middle of my mass! I came as soon as I could leave the altar." He looked round him in agony. "Am I too late?"

"No," said the Doctor, his face working. "No; but only just in time. Hurry, man, hurry! I've done all I could. I can do nothing more. It is — it is your turn now."

The single note of the chapel bell of Luciennes floated in through the window.

"Where is he?" cried the Canon, bewildered.

The Doctor seized him by the elbow.

"In her room. Hurry!" He opened the door, pushed his old friend in and closed it again behind him. Again the bell note was heard; first the single warning stroke, then the beat of the plaintive vibration dying reluctantly into silence.

The Doctor started. "These cursed mediæval customs — as if life were not sad enough already!" he wailed within himself.

Up went finger and thumb to his lip. He stood by the door, bitterly waiting.

CHAPTER XLI

LED by Madame de Lormes, the household of Luciennes, with the murmur, as it might be, of many waters, came trooping into the room which was the antechamber of death. Some as yet scarce dressed, with bewildered sleepy stare; the English coachman with impassive face; a couple of game-keepers with gipsy skins and wild woodland eyes; kitchen-maids from whose round cheeks not even the rumour of death had been able to scare the colours. At the end of the long stream, a thin, shrinking figure with faltering steps and white face marked with suffering — all that a man's passion had left of her who had once been well suited with the name of Rose! Beside her, his short-sighted gaze fixed like that of one walking in his sleep, came Favereau. And finally, with a patter of little frightened feet, a flutter of garments and flying sobs, Nessie Rodriguez again. She vehemently pushed her way between them all, crying:

"Oh, will no one stop that dreadful bell!"

"Hush!" said Madame de Lormes, rebuking. "Silence!" ordered she, turning to the whispering

servants. "It is the passing bell: on your knees, all of you, and pray for the soul that is going."

She swept up to the table and knelt down first, facing the room. The servants, falling into a circle, followed her example. Favereau, with a sudden failure of his self-control, fell upon his knees too against a chair, and wrung his clasped hands above his head. The Doctor still stood at Helen's door.

Three times the note of the passing bell dropped into the deep silence; faded away tremulously. The Doctor's hands crept to his ears as if to stifle the sound, then slowly, like one impelled by an unseen force, he too sank on his knees, folded his rugged fingers and bent his head.

Over the murmur of praying lips a voice weeping and wailing in the distance penetrated into the room.

The old housekeeper exchanged a terrified look with the majordomo, rose painfully from her knees and stepped out with ponderous precaution. There was a shrill scream on the threshold, and then, her baby curls wild, a dark cloak flung over the white night-gown, her feet bare, Joy broke in upon them, striking right and left at those that tried vainly to arrest her.

"Where is he?" she shrieked. "I will go to him. If he is dying, as you say, then I must go to him!"

All rose from their knees. There was an instinctive rush to place a living barrier before the door of the death room.

"Girl," said Madame de Lormes, advancing with fierce menace upon her — "girl, have you no decency?"

At the same instant Nessie Rodriguez caught the struggling figure by the arm.

"Come away, for the Lord's sake, you — you who brought all this about! Go and hide your face and weep alone."

But Joy wrenched herself free with furious gesture. "Let me go, I say! What do I care for any of you! You fools, you let him go to his death without lifting a finger; him, that man who was a prince among you, whose hand none of you were worthy to touch — you let him go and be murdered!" Her voice rose into a scream. "What do I care for any of you; let me go!"

The folding doors were pushed apart and Helen appeared supporting herself with a hand on each.

She stood, looking straight before her; the smallest sound was hushed among them all. Her white lips parted:

"Stop the bell."

First it ran in awestruck whisper from mouth to mouth: "The master's dead, the master's dead, the Duke is dead." Then it broke forth in momentary clamour. Joy fell on the floor in a heap as if struck down.

"Dead, dead!"

They began to huddle together and slink away, these honest serving folk who, distantly or closely,

had loved their master, and knew not how to bear themselves where death, that most ordinary of visitors, had come in such extraordinary fashion. One of the game-keepers, turning at the door, bent his knee and made the sign of the cross as if in church.

Lebel, with a scarlet face of trouble, cast one look at Helen's motionless figure, then he whispered hastily to Madame de Lormes:

"Get that girl away before the Duchess sees her."

Madame de Lormes approached the crouching figure and, bending over it, in a hissing undertone hurled her ban:

"Out of this room! Out of this house! You have made a widow of your benefactress, a murderer of my son! Have you not done enough? Back to where you came from, back to the streets — accursed that you are!"

From the huddled heap on the floor two savage dark eyes looked up for a second; then on hands and knees Joy crept a step away, a step nearer the inner chamber. Now Nessie darted at her.

"If Helen sees her it will just kill her! Come with me," she cried, gripping the thin shoulder; "I'll take you ——"

"Where would you take me?" asked Joy, in a toneless voice.

"Where? I don't know. To some house — some house of penance where they receive such as you."

As she spoke Nessie strove to drag the girl from the floor, and Joy gave a sharp cry, like a hurt child. At the sound Helen started and seemed to wake.

She looked round upon the room, at the group, at Joy, and the marble stillness of her face became troubled as with a yet hardly realised horror.

"Out! out!" again whispered Nessie in Joy's ear.

"Let her be carried away," said Madame de Lormes, loudly. "Call back the men!"

"Stop!" cried the Duchess, in a loud, clear voice. She threw back the doors and the bedroom lay disclosed, its curtained darkness illumined by the lighted candles at the head of the bed upon which lay the motionless figure under the purple folds, with just one ivory hand catching the light. The Canon's white head shone with a silver aureole as he knelt by the side, his elbows on the hurdle, holding the crucifix aloft in his clasped hands; his voice rose and fell in low, ardent supplication.

Helen advanced and looked a second with majestic reproach upon them all. Then she spoke.

"Is there not one Christian among you?"

They fell back before her in awestruck silence. She turned her eyes upon the prostrate girl:

"Child!"

It was a cry from the depths of her betrayed heart.

Joy crept nearer on her hands and knees, caught up the fold of Helen's garments, laid her head upon her feet, and at last broke into sobs and tears.

Thereupon Favereau, white ghost of himself, came forward from his hidden corner.

"Go, go!" cried he, driving the spectators before him. "Go all of you. Let us leave them alone!"

He himself, the last to retire, stood a second on the threshold and cast a long look back at Helen's beautiful, motionless figure, at the crouching heap at her feet. Then he softly closed the passage door.

Helen and Joy were alone in the room. And beyond lay the dead Cluny. Suddenly, from between her sobs, as she clasped and kissed her benefactress' feet, the girl began to moan faintly:

"I loved him too; ah, I loved him too!"

Helen's face contracted, a great spasm of horror, of revolt came over it. The Canon's voice rose from within in that prayer of the agonised believer which, in its fervid insistence, seems almost to command the Almighty.

"Remember not his sins, O Lord, for he has hoped in you. Succour his soul, O Saints of God, meet him, Angels of God, receive him. May he rest in peace, may he rest in peace!"

Helen echoed the words aloud: "Peace, peace!" Then, with a cry: "Remember not his sins! . . . It was his sin!"

She folded her hands over her broken heart. "*His sin, O merciful God! Grant me strength to atone for him to Thee!*" She looked down at Joy. "*To atone to her, for him!*"

Stooping, she raised her, held her.

"Poor child!"

And her tears began to stream.

THAT DAY MONTH

CHAPTER XLII

THE Doctor came down the steps of the house to the terrace and walked slowly up to the Canon who was waiting for him by their favourite corner of the balustrade.

On this cold November afternoon, faded was the glorious panorama they had gazed upon together a month ago, faded and desolate. Brown or grey now lay fields and woods under a lowering sky, with dull wrack sailing low before a driving wind. Shrouded was the valley in obscuring mist, over which the arches of the distant aqueduct seemed to hang in mid-air like some fantastic cloud vision.

"Well?" said the priest, hurriedly, as soon as his friend had joined him.

"Well," answered the Doctor, driving his hands deep into his pockets with his familiar gesture. "Oh, she is all right! At least, as right as she 'll ever be in this world." He looked gloomily across the sallow land and ended with a noisy sigh.

"She was looking very pale, very pale, this morning in the chapel," said the Canon, seemingly ill-satisfied. "Had she a headache?"

"I don't think so. She cries so much," the Doctor's mouth twitched a little, "it is hard to tell by her face."

"Her pulse?"

"Quite normal."

"Some little tonic?"

The Doctor exploded with that rage of the sore heart that no one ever resents.

"*Saperlipopette!* Go and prescribe for her yourself! Indeed, my good Canon, it 's really within your province. Is not this the sort of case when religion is supposed to come in? Where are all these famous consolations?" He broke off as if ashamed of his vehemence. "There, there," he exclaimed, forestalling the sad rebuke he saw in the priest's eyes, "I 'll not say but she has found help. Ah, poor child, true or false, it is all she has! Who would try to rob her of it? Not I . . . not I."

The Canon laid his hand on the Doctor's threadbare sleeve. The wind was blowing very chill about them, fluttering the priest's long white hair, making the Doctor's loose coat flap. Yellow leaves, torn from their withered stems, drifted past them. With one accord they fell to pacing between the empty flower-beds.

"When she spoke to me on the chapel steps this morning," said the priest, "I confess that her appearance alarmed me. She scarcely looked as if she belonged to this earth. That was why I begged you to find a pretext for looking in upon her."

"No cause for anxiety," said the Doctor, impa-

tiently, "so long as you don't make her too good for this earth — for she is wanted down here badly," he added with a sigh.

The Canon hesitated, then he said in a low voice: "She told me that I might write to Monsieur Favereau to come and see her."

The Doctor started. "Glad to hear it," he cried emphatically. "Ah, poor fellow, how he has suffered!"

"She never had anger in her heart," pursued the Canon; "not even against the man" — his voice changed to a quite unconscious note of deep resentment — "against the man who was the cause of her husband's death."

He paused. The Doctor gnashed his teeth. Human nature dies hard even in the saint: there was enough of the old "man" left in the Canon of Marly to make him feel that although he could not, of course, approve of the Doctor's muttered curse, neither could he find it in his heart to rebuke him for it. After a few moments he pursued, as if he had heard nothing:

"From the very first day she made the sacrifice of forgiveness — forgiveness towards all. As regards Monsieur Favereau, her old friend, whom she had relied on for help her whole life long, and who had failed her at the test, she never spoke one bitter word except that first cry: 'He knew!' Ah me, but that was the most terrible indictment! Lebel, Lebel, fancy what it would have meant to her if *he* at least had had the courage to do right. He made me tell

him what she had said. Shall I ever forget his face as he turned away and walked down that road, left this place, he thought, never to return!"

"She could not bear to see him," commented the Doctor. "It is only natural."

"It was perhaps the last little touch of earthly weakness left in her," said the Canon. "She has now surmounted it. Every day I see the trouble which is of this world fade from her sorrow and the serenity grow which is of the world to come. She was faithful to her God in her happiness: in her trial He has not abandoned her."

The Doctor wagged his head with a look of ineradicable doubt struggling with grudged admission. They took a few paces in silence, then he exclaimed bitterly:

"Yes, yes. That 's the sort of thing that sounds so fine from the pulpit, Canon. But allow me to say that the way in which the Duchess has been treated by what you are pleased to call Providence is hardly encouraging for others to place their funds in that bank."

It might have been remarked by any who had known the quarrelsome friends a month ago that a change had come over their relations. The scathing rebuke that at this irreverence would have flashed in the Canon's eye and issued from his lips was now absent. The only emotion visible on his countenance was one of the most affectionate distress. As for the Doctor himself, no sooner were the words out of his mouth than he put out his hand in apology and added with quite unwonted gentleness:

"Forgive me, Canon. One must have one's growl in this brute of a world, you know. Upon my word, I'm not sure that you people who manage to keep up a faith in a better one have not the pull over us in the long run. But there's my unfortunate logic always cropping up, you see."

"Ah, my dear friend," said the Canon, "use your logic then in this instance, before you cast up to a merciful God the misfortunes of this house. Go back once again to their primary cause. Our poor Duke ——" His voice quivered, and the Doctor with a hasty gesture of the hand begged for silence. Neither of them, from their vastly different standpoints, could yet bear to cast a word of blame on the memory of that beloved sinner.

"I must speak, though," pursued the priest, after a pause. "Had the Duke remained in the path God had marked out for him as for the rest of the world, what a happy home should ours still be to-day, instead of ——" Again he stopped, then went on in low resigned accents: "Henceforth must it not be for all of us so long as we live a house of mourning? Even then, the first grievous act once committed, had Monsieur Favereau not tried to mend wrong by further wrong, had you not all, you yourself included, at the actual moment of catastrophe, condoned, nay, helped to, that fatal duel, that grievous infraction of the written word of God, she might now be weeping it is true, but not the widow's tears. Ah, no, my friend," cried the priest, with a sorrowful warmth, "it is not Providence who has worked to this sorrow, it is sin."

"What the devil!" exclaimed the Doctor, indignantly, scrubbing his beard. "Throw the blame on me, now do! It 's all my fault, of course. I should just like you to tell me what I could have done?"

"The right," again asserted the other, unhesitatingly.

They had reached the head of the steps which led down to the garden.

"Well, I am going home," said Lebel, grumpily.

Mildly answered his friend: "Our ways lie together."

Lebel shrugged his shoulders; the priest's last words were rankling in his mind. He ran down the steps. But half-way through "the Canon's walk," at the stone bench where they had met on the morning of that memorable day and had planned to divert the course of Fate, he halted and waited for his friend.

As the latter came up, not a little out of breath, the Doctor greeted him with a fresh outburst.

"You remember what I said to you a few weeks ago, here in this very place? Hold me responsible, indeed! Who aided the Duchess in that folly of adoption, I should like to know. Thousand thunders! One does what one can! Do you think I liked to go and see him shot? Had that cursed ball sped differently, my presence might have saved his life perhaps. I should have gone for the police, I suppose? Pretty business! As if that would have stopped anything, either. At least we kept the scandal from spreading. And then you talk of sin,

sin, sin! What of your holy, well-thinking Marquise? She is righteous enough, that one! She knew, as well as I did; could have helped as much as I could."

His voice died away in a muttered grumble. The Canon lifted his head with the ghost of a bygone haughtiness.

"The poor Marquise," said he. "Alas, she failed on the side of her predominant passion! It was a question of tradition, you see."

Dr. Lebel flung a shrewd, mocking look at the priest's aristocratic face.

"You think, no doubt," he jeered, "that I, as the son of peasant folk and blacksmiths, have no excuse; but that for the aristocratic transgressions of the others — people of quality — there are special accommodations with Heaven, eh, Monsieur de Hauteroche?"

"I?" cried the priest, startled. He flushed to the roots of his hair, then sank upon the bench and covered his face with his hands.

"God knows," said he, "God knows the clay of which He has fashioned us! Alas, my friend, there is but one thing clear, one thing we must learn in all this, that He alone can make good out of evil — man cannot."

The Doctor plumped down on the stone, propped his chin on his hands and shook his head from side to side in deep despondency.

"Oh, I 'll not say," he cried at last, "there 's something in your theory! But that good woman, that

gentle creature, what harm did she do? How has your just God rewarded her?"

"Hold, sir," said the priest, "and I will tell you. She has been rewarded as she herself would have chosen to be rewarded — by the only reward meet for her and one which transcends all earthly blessings — the salvation of her husband's soul. I was present at that death. It was a moment of immeasurable sorrow, yet of unspeakable consolation. I may say that her husband's repentant spirit passed through her hands to his God. No despair can ever touch Helen now. Therefore does she weep like those who have hope. Not only that," continued the Canon, "but that other soul, that soul that was living in death, through him, through his fault, she has called it to life again."

The Doctor jerked up his head and stared at his friend: his little eyes were very fierce, as if in defiance of the tear that was rising to them.

"Do you really think," he asked, "that such a business will work? That they can go on living together up there? That that little devil's spawn won't break her rescuer's heart again when the hour comes? It 's clean against nature all round, Canon!"

"It 's a miracle of God's grace," said the Canon, with a confident smile. "Anything less marvellous, less superhuman, would have been beneath that perfect soul."

There was a long silence, filled by deep thought, to the accompaniment of the autumn wind's sad song. At last the Doctor shook off the reverie.

"And the girl?" he asked.

"The girl!" resumed the other, earnestly. "Oh, I have great hopes! That extraordinary power of passion in her which was, alas! spent in such an unregulated torrent, seems to have been diverted into another course — one that cannot but be productive of good, of healing, of rehabilitation. The Duchess is now the object of the poor wayward child's jealous devotion. I build greatly on that — greatly. Helen will eventually transfer this love, as she transferred her husband's, to God."

The Doctor looked sceptical, opened his mouth to contradict, marked the Canon's face, which these last few weeks had so altered, so aged, transfigured now as with an inner light, and refrained.

Why cast a doubt upon this faith? What had he, after all, so much better to offer instead?

He put out his hand and affectionately tapped his old friend's knee.

"Well," said he, "who knows?"

THE END

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